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ST GILBERT OF SEMPRINGHAM

PREVIOUS VOLUMES IN THE SERIES

ST PATRICK

ST MARGARET OF SCOTLAND

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ST GERTRUDE THE GREAT



GILBERTINE CANON
FROM DUGDALE'S MONASTICON

ST GILBERT OF SEMPRINGHAM

1089—1189



WITHDRAWN

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PREFACE

THE earliest known life of St Gilbert was written by a canon of his Order at the behest of Master Roger, the saint's successor. It is preserved in three manuscripts still extant: the early thirteenth century *Cotton MS.*, the later thirteenth century *Harleian MS.*, and the fifteenth century *Digby MS.* In a lengthy prologue which takes the form of a dedicatory letter to Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, the writer says that, having lived long at Sempringham, he knew Gilbert well; that Master Roger had told him many things about Gilbert; and that Albinus, the saint's chaplain, supplied much information touching his life and holiness.

In the following pages the account of miracles is drawn directly from the *Digby MS.*, as is also the narrative of the Pope's vision, given in an appendix. Great care has been taken to make an accurate translation of the mediæval Latin.

These documents, and others relating to the saint and his Order, are most easily accessible

in Dugdale's "*Monasticon Anglicanum*," from which certain incidents, notably the visions described in Chapter XV., are reproduced almost verbatim.

In that part of the biography which deals with monasticism, Abbot Gasquet's "English Monastic Life" and "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries" have been largely used.

The volume on St Gilbert by Father Dalgairns, in the series of lives of the English saints, edited by Cardinal Newman before his conversion, has been found of great service.

Very grateful acknowledgment must also be made to Miss Rose Graham, F.R.Hist.Soc., for the courtesy with which she allowed free use of her learned work "St Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines."

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SAINT GILBERT OF SEMPRINGHAM

INTRODUCTION

IN an old partly restored monastic building—a remnant of mediæval England—is a curious stained-glass window. The central figure, that of a saint, is strangely distorted and indistinct. Once it was a work of art, beautiful in symmetry, symbolism, and colour. Now contour of form is barely maintained in rude and broken outline.

At some date in the distant past the window was removed. So much is obvious, as is also the fact that at a later period it was replaced, the work being done by an ignorant and unskilled workman.

Little attempt was made to reproduce the original design; many of the glass fragments, clear and coloured, were set haphazard in the picture.

The sight of the old coloured light evokes in the spectator feelings of a varied nature—keen interest in a historic treasure, regret that the work of resetting was so imperfectly accomplished, and a desire to rearrange and re-adjust.

There is, between the history of the old window, and that of the original word-picture of St Gilbert, a close analogy.

Some sixty years ago the chronicles of Sempringham were unearthed. The dust of ages had obliterated many lines of the founder's picture, yet, so far as it went, it was a true likeness.

Later, a further attempt was made to clear away the traces of time, and this work also was in a measure successful. The form of the saint, freed from much irrelevant matter in which it lay hidden, took once more some semblance of life, although it still wanted continuity of outline and definiteness of proportion.

The picture, though still elusive and incomplete, was enhanced by the beauty of a noble historic setting.

In the present life of St Gilbert an effort has been made not only to reproduce the figure so faithfully exhibited by previous historians, but to do more—to fill in the outline which was lacking,

to supply with native colour that which has been lost through lapse of time, or accident, and finally to produce a more finished, if still faint portrait of the chivalrous and gentle saint of Sempringham.

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

ST GILBERT OF SEMPRINGHAM was born towards the end of the eleventh century when the Red King ruled in England. It was a time of national depression. The people were still suffering from the terrors of the Norman Conquest. Bad as social conditions had been under the Conqueror they were still worse under his son, for Rufus lacked his father's strength of character and great administrative powers.

The stream of foreign fortune-hunters which followed in the wake of the invading army had settled on English soil and had become an integral part of the population. This vast concourse of people included all sorts and conditions of men. The spoils of the conquerors had been shared among them.

To the nobles who fought for him William had given the biggest share of the plunder. The confiscated property of the slain or fugitive Saxons was distributed, either as a reward for

service rendered or as bribe for future support. Saxon ladies bereft of husband or father were bestowed in marriage on the king's favourites. Sometimes beauty was the prize, more often wealth. Norman soldiers followed the example of their betters, and took what they could get, if not by fair means, then by foul.

When William Rufus came to the throne the violence of the struggle was over, but unrest remained. From time to time isolated bands of Saxons would collect and make desperate though futile efforts to recover independence and freedom. The great fens of the Wash were a harbour of refuge to the Saxon leaders. A contemporary writer speaks of the fen country as "that land of marshes, those fields of reeds, the last asylum of the independence and courage of the vanquished." This vast expanse of marshy ground stretched northwards as far as Lincoln, and southwards up the Cam to Cambridge. The strongholds which the Saxons made for themselves on the islands in the marshes were as inaccessible to the Norman foe, save for treachery, as the Cambrian mountain fastnesses had been to the ancestors of the Saxons centuries before.

At the time our narrative opens, the country bordering the fens was tranquil. The rising under Hereward had failed some years previously.

Its consequences remained in the smouldering discontent of the Saxons and in the domineering arrogance of the Normans. On the land immediately adjoining this territory stood the little village of Sempringham. A rich Norman noble named Jocelin had taken up his abode there in a fine castle, almost the only habitation of any importance for miles around. His wife was a Saxon lady, tradition says of lower rank than her husband. Their only child was born about the year 1089. They named him Gilbert, probably after Jocelin's feudal lord, Gilbert de Gant.

Before the child's birth his mother had a strange dream. She thought that the moon came down from heaven, and that she held it in her lap. The vision seemed to presage future joy for herself, and future sanctity for her child. Writing of this dream many years later one of Gilbert's spiritual sons says : " This was indeed a sign, as it was afterwards made manifest, that like a torch prepared by God, her son should wax great in the world, just as a spark hid in the ashes, when placed in a candlestick, shines with great brightness to give light to all who are in the house."

The mother's hopes, however, were doomed to disappointment, for the child in his earliest years showed no signs of sanctity, nor indeed did he

give promise of any future greatness. Gilbert was deformed and delicate in body, peevish and wayward in disposition. His lack of personal strength and beauty, was, even in infancy, a source of chagrin and annoyance to his father. Already he foresaw that his designs for his son's future would be frustrated.

During the years of infancy and early childhood the boy was under his mother's immediate care, and her love shielded him from unkindness and injury. When, however, the time came for him to pass into the charge of a tutor, the case was different. He now had free access to the great hall of the castle, where the servants and soldiers congregated. Little Gilbert was no favourite with them. Perhaps his peevish ways estranged the sympathies of the rough retainers, perhaps the rancour existing between Normans and Saxons, who made up the household, prejudiced the discontented against the boy. Whatever may have been the cause, Gilbert was disliked by his father's servants. The soldiers made him the butt of their coarse jests and ridicule, the underlings treated him with scant respect, and, worst of all, his father looked upon him with evident disapproval.

Under this treatment the boy grew morose and sullen. His physical deformity, of which he

became painfully conscious, added to the unhappiness of his life. Probably it was his mother's gentle influence which saved Gilbert's character from becoming like his body, maimed and deformed. With the deep faith so characteristic of Saxon England, when by its manifest piety it earned the title of Our Lady's Dowry, she early instilled into his heart a deep personal love of our Lord, and a tender, chivalric devotion to His Blessed Mother.

When the boy, irritated and impatient, gave way to fits of sullen despondency, she would gently lead him back to paths of peace by reminding him of One Who had suffered passion and death for his sake. Then she would try to clear away the clouds of misunderstanding which parted father and son. But Jocelin could not look patiently upon his ungainly boy, nor could he understand his shy and sullen ways. From his Saxon mother Gilbert inherited all that was best in his character. From her he drew the inspiration which led him from his tenderest years to place God first in thought and action; from his mother, too, came that simple piety which helped him to assimilate so readily her early lessons in sacred lore.

Jocelin, seeing that his son was unfit to be a soldier, determined to make him a cleric. The

sacerdotal state seemed to him the only honourable alternative. Gilbert, accordingly, was set to the study of letters. The task was most distasteful. The household chaplain, upon whom devolved the duty of directing his studies, does not appear to have found his work either easy or pleasant. His pupil was idle and dull. The old chronicle says, "The labour of learning, which is wont heavily to afflict boys, frightened his tender years." The insinuated excuse is a little pathetic, and is due no doubt to the desire of the narrator to exonerate from blame the child who afterwards became his spiritual father. The fact remains, however, that Gilbert was neither a diligent nor a responsive pupil. He was constantly in disgrace with his tutor, and as often subjected to chidings and reproofs from his father. Later events showed that he was not wanting in ability or power of appreciation. The cause of his excessive disinclination for study remains a mystery. Perhaps harsh words and severe discipline paralysed the sensitive mind which, under the influence of kind and gentle treatment, would have expanded and blossomed as a flower in the sunshine. How was it that his mother's gentle influence failed to charm him as of old into docility and submission? Possibly he had little opportunity in those days of disclosing

to her his troubles, and it may be that he hesitated to inflict pain upon her by the recital of his own delinquencies.

Another reason for his reticence may be found in the fact that he was quickly leaving childhood behind him, and as he advanced towards manhood, the goal of every boy's ambition, he strove to practise the manly virtues which he saw in those around him—patience under pain, and the courage which disdained to show a wound. There were no brave scholars in Jocelin's household, no men of learning save the tutor, to render honourable by noble example the career of letters.

Beneath the boy's ill-favoured exterior, however, there lay hidden many noble qualities of heart and mind—a nature refined and gentle, a will tenacious and firm, a love of all that was good and pure, a keen appreciation of truth and honour. In the early days of his sad and desolate childhood the tender, loving care of his mother was the one bright spot, and it awoke in little Gilbert's heart a passionate response. His sensitive nature found solace in her ready sympathy, and the feelings then awakened in his soul influenced all his future life. The deep reverence and chivalrous devotion which Gilbert ever evinced towards women had its root, we may believe, in the passion of his childhood, the

deep-seated love of a son for a good and noble mother.

Jocelin was a soldier and a knight, and his son had all the enthusiastic admiration of his class for feats of arms and prowess in the field. Yet even in boyhood he could realise that the noblest victory which man can achieve is that of self-conquest. As he listened to wild talk of knights and dames he could recognise the truth that the highest ideals of knighthood might be accomplished without thrust of lance or spear. The boy, sensitive and reserved, pondered over life as it lay before him, dormant emotions stirred in his soul, and the knowledge came to him of a spiritual chivalry, of an order of knights whose quest should be God's honour, whose goal the court of Heaven.

He was still an unwilling scholar, and evaded his tasks when he could. One day his exasperated tutor complained about him to his father with greater warmth than usual. Jocelin was very angry and he punished his son more severely than he had ever done before. His mother, too, was displeased with him. With mingled feelings of fear and shame the boy, in solitude, thought over his troubles.

Presently, as he grew calmer, he began to think hard about his life. He knew well that his

father's plans concerning his education were just and reasonable. He realised that all the vexations of later years had come upon him from want of application to study. As the knowledge of this truth became fixed in his mind, there arose slowly a determined and steady resolve. He would learn. Reviewing the past, and the circumstances in which he was then placed, Gilbert saw that study under home conditions was an impossibility. He must get away. But how?

Thoughts came surging on him, thick and fast, urging him to impulse and to action. Jocelin's spirit, the spirit of the war-loving Norman, was coming to life in his son. He would away to France! It was the land of learning and of gallantry. Where the happy and the gay sought glory, he would seek honour.

That hour of pain and thought closed the years of Gilbert's childhood. With its passing the first aspirations of manhood broke into being, and although they might again become dormant, for he was but a boy, yet henceforth he could never be the same as before.

The days which followed were calm and quiet, more, however, with the stillness which precedes the storm than with the freshness which follows it. Gilbert was busy with schemes and projects. He had resolved to leave home. How to accom-

plish his purpose was the problem which occupied his mind. Should he consult his father, or should he act alone?

Many guests came and went between Sempringham and Lincoln. Gilbert had learnt from knights and squires something of the great world which lay beyond his ken. The direct road to London was by the Irmin Street, the old Roman road which ran straight from Lincoln to the great city.

Cavalcades of horsemen with waggons and servants were constantly coming and going. The boy was convinced that in the company of one of these he could easily make his way to London. Nobles and lords of high estate often came to his father's house, and the spirit of the times was such that to help an adventurous boy out of the dullness of life in such a place as Sempringham would commend itself to most as a deed both gallant and generous. A patron would not be hard to find. Gilbert de Gant, his father's feudal lord, lived at Folkingham only three miles distant. No obstacles would be insurmountable if his influence were secured.

Whether Jocelin knew of his son's plans or not, he apparently took small part in furthering or frustrating them. And his mother? The sadness which clouded the last days of

intercourse between her and Gilbert needs no description. Like many another Saxon mother, she had learnt to foster and exercise the courage of her race in silent endurance. She knew that there are paths in a boy's life which he must tread alone, that there are temptations he must meet and overcome unaided, save by the help which his mother's prayers can give him.

The journey to Lincoln was not difficult to accomplish. Gilbert had often ridden thither with servants and others. Nor was it difficult for him to find a company with whom to join on the way. The road was perilous, but under the protection of servants and courtiers he was safe.

London city was like a scene out of a magic world; but the traveller did not linger there. Many ships were bound for France, and with an honourable name and noble patronage a passage on one was easily found.

Scholars of all ages and conditions flocked to the French schools, so that Gilbert's presence on the road occasioned no surprise.

Arrived in Paris, the goal of his desires, he secured a modest lodging in the students' quarter of the city, and, after having obtained admission to one of the great seats of learning, he settled down to a life of earnest study. He soon became

influenced by the enthusiasm of those around him, and rivalled the most eager in his pursuit of knowledge. There were at that time two great schools in Paris, and two great scholars—William of Champeaux, who lectured in the Priory of St Victor; Abelard, who taught on the hill of St Geneviève.

Gilbert's life as a student was laborious and edifying. He lived in retirement. The allurements of the gay city had no power to fascinate him. In thought he often travelled back to Sempringham, and, remembering the sorrows of his childhood, would blame himself excessively for the troubles which had marred his home life. He determined henceforth "to wed the discipline of a good life to liberal knowledge."

So the years of adolescence passed away. News from Sempringham came to him at uncertain intervals. His father had long since forgiven his childish faults and follies and he had liberally supplied for all his needs.

As the time approached for his return home, Gilbert thought much about his future life. During his years of study he had become thoroughly conversant with sacred lore, and was fully convinced that secular learning profits little, unless allied with, and subservient to, a knowledge of things divine. His first biographer

expressed this thought when he wrote, " Gilbert held that wisdom without virtue is a widow."

Often in the later years of his sojourn in France, he would spend much of the night in prayer. Communing with God, his soul was lifted above things of sense, and thenceforth it became impossible for him to find happiness or contentment in the transient pleasures of this world.

CHAPTER II

DAWN OF VOCATION

IT is impossible to determine definitely the length of Gilbert's sojourn abroad. He had left England a boy; he returned a man. In the interval he had acquired a reputation for sanctity and learning. Upon the frail foundation of childhood's lessons he had built a character remarkable for integrity and strength. When at length he returned to Sempringham he found many changes there. The country indeed remained the same. To the east the vast expanse of fenland still stretched away in calm solitude to the sea, while to the west and north green meadows wandered on, as of old, into uplands of peaceful pasture.

Gilbert's home had grown doubly dear to him during the years of absence, and he came back to it with eagerness and joy. The feelings with which he gazed upon the old familiar scenes can be well imagined. The castle, in its solitary grandeur, stood like a great sentinel in the level lowlands. The pent-up emotions of years strove

for expression as with quiet exterior, though throbbing heart, Gilbert contemplated the home of his childhood. That love of country and kindred, which grows fonder through absence, was as much a characteristic of human nature in the twelfth as it is in the twentieth century.

In the early days of his return, he would wander through the well-known places which were so closely connected with the memory of his early sorrows. There he had learnt to subdue repinings at enforced inactivity when he saw boys of his own age and position join the hunt or follow the brilliant hawking party. On many a bright morning he had watched the sportsmen as they clattered out of the courtyard to the sound of the falcon's tinkling bell, or the merry laugh of knight and squire.

He realised that a great change had taken place in himself, and he knew that a learned education had fitted him to fill becomingly his position as son and heir of a great noble. Adversity had perfected the teaching of his early years. As the oak when torn and buffeted by the wind strikes its roots deeper into the soil, so the storms of life had strengthened Gilbert in mind and character. The clouds of ignorance and doubt which enveloped his soul in boyhood had been cleared away by the action of God's grace, even

as the mist-veil hovering over the great fen was dispelled and dispersed by the warmth and brilliancy of the summer sunshine. Providence had led him by ways apart, in order that he might the more readily adapt himself to the workings of the Divine Will.

All differences between Gilbert and his father had passed away with his boyhood. When he returned from France, Jocelin received him with marks of honour and affection, ensuring to him on all occasions the respect which was his due as the eldest son of a noble house.

Education and culture had cloaked, if not cured, his physical deformity, and he now changed his scholar's gown for the finer clothes of the courtier. He took part, as far as possible, in the pastimes and pursuits of his class. Nevertheless, in spite of gaiety of life and costliness of apparel, Gilbert was more remarkable for the modesty of his bearing than for the grandeur of his attire.

The Norman nobles of the time were wealthy and powerful, holding almost absolute dominion over their vassals. The condition of the country people depended, therefore, in a great measure, upon the dispositions of the lord of the manor; these conditions varied according to the character and pursuits of the ruling knight or squire. How

the folk of Sempringham had benefited by the advent of a Norman noble is not evident, but as there is no witness to the contrary we may conclude that Jocelin was a kind and generous master, and that under his rule the state of his Saxon vassals was bettered. This view is further maintained by the fact that later he aided his son in all his schemes for the welfare of the people.

Gilbert's mind, even when apparently occupied with worldly affairs, was nevertheless directed towards the things of God. His great desire was to do good to those around him. To lead the people of his native village to a more fervent practice of religion became, for the time at least, his highest ambition. Knowing that example is more powerful than precept, he strove by a life of virtue to lead others towards the path of holiness. Like many missionaries of later times, he saw that, to obtain permanent results in religious and moral training, it was necessary to sow the good seed in the hearts of the young where bad habits had not already taken root. It was the consideration of this truth which led him to take the first important step in his career of reform. He opened a village school and took upon himself the task of master. This was about the year 1120.

To understand fully the significance of the

work we must bear in mind the state of rural England at that time. To the particular disabilities under which the Saxons laboured reference has already been made. The greater number of the inhabitants of Sempringham were of the original English stock; the Normans, however, were richer and held more influential positions.

To Gilbert's school all classes were welcomed. The child of the Saxon churl sat beside the son of the Norman squire; the descendants of the Saxon thane went to school with the children of the Norman artisan.

Learning was esteemed as a pearl of great price, and the children were sent in crowds to seek it. The nearest school heretofore had been at Lincoln, and was of little profit to dwellers in remote Sempringham.

The scholars were ignorant yet eager to learn, the master zealous and enthusiastic. Girls and boys alike thronged to hear his teaching. At first the progress made was slow, but, as time went on, Gilbert became proud of his pupils, especially of the girls, some of whom became proficient Latin scholars. His greatest attention, however, was given to lessons in religious knowledge. From the first he inculcated the truth that learning was only of value inasmuch as it proved

an aid to virtue. He taught them to aim at the practice of religious perfection, to understand and value the services and liturgy of the Church. From the words of the chronicler it is evident that the boy-scholars slept and boarded at the school. The girls, no doubt, were day-pupils.

The master set great store upon the moral as well as the religious training of the children. "He restrained the boys from the liberty of playing and wandering at will." The time allowed for play, work, and prayer was regulated and restricted. Gilbert insisted on devout and decorous behaviour in church. He forbade any talking in the sacred edifice. The boys slept in a dormitory where silence was enforced.

The school routine appears to have resembled closely that in vogue in ordinary monastic schools. That the master should have been able to organise and maintain such a school under such conditions is remarkable. Unfortunately, the records of its after-history are scanty. For a moment the light of the founder's sanctity flashes on the village school—we see its eager throng of boys and girls, its holy master, and the enthusiastic zeal and keen interest emanating from teacher and taught,—and then the shadows fall.

Sempringham school lived on, but its founder and master passed to a higher work.



ST ANDREW'S CHURCH, SEMPRINGHAM

To face page 23.]

After Gilbert's return from France no further mention is made of his mother; it may therefore be assumed that she died before he began his life of village service. The name of his father occurs frequently in the Sempringham records. Jocelin gradually realised the loftiness of his son's ideals, and the feelings of tolerance and respect which had succeeded the dislike of early days gave place to sentiments of the sincerest love and admiration.

The village prospered; the lord of the manor became the protector of his people. Jocelin built two churches on his own property, one at Sempringham, the other at West Torrington. Both of these he gave to his son. Gilbert was fully aware of the responsibilities attached, and it was after long deliberation that he consented to accept the gift, and then only with great reluctance and in order "to defend his father's right of patronage."

Gilbert had laid aside his costly dress when he took up the work of village schoolmaster, and had come to be looked upon as a monk or a cleric, although he had not in any way bound himself to the official service of the Church. However, after the acceptance of the responsibilities of his father's churches, his career was fixed and certain. As he was not in Holy Orders his right to these churches was denied, and, notwith-

standing the fact that he had been "lawfully and canonically instituted" by the Bishop of Lincoln, it was only "after many troublesome suits that he was allowed to possess the churches in peace." The bestowal of such a gift reads strangely to us, yet it was no uncommon one, and there was nothing irregular or unusual about it. The council of Rouen in 1231 dealt with the subject, which bristled with difficulties, and allowed the alternative to clerks possessing benefices of either "being ordained or betaking themselves to the study of theology."

Gilbert appointed a chaplain to undertake the care of his churches, and the cure of those souls attached to them. This chaplain's name was Geoffrey, and he and Gilbert were great friends. It is probable that he helped his patron in the work of the school; in any case they dwelt together in a humble lodging in the house of one of the village folk, whose daughter attended the school and who was one of the master's best scholars. This maiden, who was pious, modest, and simple, ministered to their needs and "served them diligently." One night the master had a strange dream, which alarmed him greatly; it presaged and foreshadowed his life's work. He dreamt that he laid his hand upon the maiden and could not draw it away again.

Troubled at the dream, and not knowing what it might portend, Gilbert confided his fears to Geoffrey, who also became alarmed. They decided to leave their present dwelling. Accordingly they took up their abode in a room over the south porch of the church, and there lived for a time in contentment, if not in great comfort. Later on they built a house in the cemetery, and here lived for some years.

The historian points out that Gilbert's dream saw its fulfilment in the Order of Sempringham—the maiden, as will be seen later, became one of the first seven nuns.

The description of Gilbert's parishioners in the old chronicle is almost a repetition of that given of his scholars. "The monastic teaching of the school was carried into their homes by the pupils, who as they grew up easily and naturally assimilated the life of monastic rule with that of the family." They kept aloof from harvest feastings, indecent revelries, and public drinkings; they learnt to do works of mercy, and to pay the tithes duly.

Sempringham parish even at that time appears to have been well organised and established. The people were noted for their reverence in church; so remarkable, indeed, was this "devoutness and lowly bearing," that they were by

it distinguished and recognised throughout the surrounding country.

Notwithstanding the general edification given by his parishioners, Gilbert, as "the physician of souls," had sometimes to rebuke the rebellious, and on these occasions he was peremptory and severe. Refusal to pay the tithe was an offence which he viewed with special displeasure. Perhaps some of his parishioners thought that the son of their overlord had no need of alms, and probably they counted upon his kindness for exemption from any penalty when payment was refused.

Gilbert, however, had very decided views on the subject of ecclesiastical discipline. He considered that as parish priest he was answerable to God for all that belonged to the Church.

On one occasion a parishioner refused to pay the tithe of corn. Gilbert, upon hearing of this delinquency, went to the barn of the defaulter, rebuked him for his avarice, and obliged him to count out the sheaves due as tithe before him. The scene was impressive—the central figure that of the saint standing in a stern and commanding attitude watching the discomfited farmer, who obediently but reluctantly counted out the appointed tenth part. When this task

was accomplished Gilbert bade the delinquent set fire to the pile, saying sternly that what he had stolen from God and His Holy Church was unfit for the use of man.

Events of this sort, rare though they were, helped to impress the village folk with the double personality of their pastor. Gilbert, the son of Jocelin, was a generous lord and master, his charity was boundless, and he asked nothing from his vassals save loyalty and love; Gilbert, the priest, was the faithful steward of the Great Overlord, who would not forego one jot or tittle of the honour which belonged by right to his Master's honour and service.

CHAPTER III

IN THE BISHOP'S PALACE

THE Bishop of Lincoln at this time was Robert Bloet, a prelate remarkable for his great personal gifts and for the intimate acquaintance he had with affairs of state and the administration of the law of the land. He had been appointed Bishop in 1094. Before that time he was attached to the court of the Conqueror as Chaplain, and had gone with him to Rouen. After William's death, Bloet was entrusted with the letter containing his last instructions to Lanfranc.

In the reign of Rufus he was nominated Lord Chancellor, a position which he held until named to the see of Lincoln.

Bloet was a man of noble and distinguished presence, with a rare gift of eloquence, and business capacities of a high order. No doubt it was these noble natural gifts which won for him the notice and favour of kings. Henry I. raised him to one of the highest positions of trust and honour in England, that of High Justiciar. This

office was not altogether compatible with the charge of a large diocese, nevertheless, he continued for some time to hold power both as a temporal lord and as a spiritual ruler. Henry of Huntingdon, who was one of his archdeacons, writes : " When I beheld the glory of our Bishop, honourable knights, noble youths, costly horses, gold, and gilded vessels, the number of the dishes, the splendour of his servants, the purple raiment and the torches, I could think of nothing more happy."

Before long, however, he fell under the displeasure of the King, who accused him of having been accessory, in two separate instances, to a miscarriage of justice. The Bishop was condemned and heavily fined; he then retired in disgrace to Lincoln.

It was after his discharge from public affairs that he sent for Gilbert. The fame of the holy clerk of Sempringham had spread far and wide. His learning was much commended, and his holiness greatly revered. He obeyed the Bishop's summons promptly, though with a heavy heart. The people of his native village had become very dear to him, and their interests were his own. Before leaving them Gilbert committed the school and parish to his friend and fellow-labourer, the Chaplain, and comforted his sorrowing flock with

the promise that he would not forget them when in his new home.

He then betook himself to the Bishop's palace, where he found a household very different in style and equipment from that maintained by Bloet in his days of public service. Now his attendants were either ecclesiastics or clerks; previously there had been lodged with these a great number of men-at-arms and secular servants.

The Bishop treated him as a friend and confidant, and relied much upon his influence and example to work a reformation in the manners of those about him. Gilbert on his part quietly accepted his position, gave his entire attention and assistance to the Bishop when called upon, fulfilled faithfully the duties allotted to him, and devoted what time remained to private devotion and to works of charity.

His patron lived only one year after his fall from favour, so that Gilbert was less than that time in his household.

His successor in the see of Lincoln was Alexander, nephew of Roger, Bishop of Salisbury. He had been brought up in his uncle's household, and probably owed election to his patronage. He earned for himself the title of "The Magnificent," a consequence of the

splendour which adorned his court, and the richness of his surroundings.

Alexander was in high favour with King Henry, who preferred to see prelates rather than unruly nobles holding offices of state. When Stephen came to the throne, he thought it advisable to curb the power of both. The routine of life in the palace of Lincoln became, under Alexander, very like what it had been in the early days of his predecessor.

In the midst of the splendour around him, Gilbert lived his quiet life of recollection and prayer. He never, however, forgot his home by the fens, nor the family of religious children he had left there. To the poor of Sempringham he gave the whole of the revenues which he derived from the parish of West Torrington; for himself he kept barely sufficient for the needs of his position. The poor were at all times, and in all places, his tenderest care.

During the whole period of his stay in the episcopal residence Gilbert wore the tonsure and dressed as an ecclesiastic. His manners were in keeping with his dress. He was affable, yet reserved, abstemious, dignified in bearing, and prudent in speech. "Already," says his biographer, "you would have thought him a regular canon rather than a clerk." With the

Bishop he became a great favourite. They shared the same bed-chamber, and kept up a most friendly intercourse. How little the distractions of the splendid episcopal palace had the power to disturb Gilbert's interior life may be gathered from a remark he made long years afterwards to one of his spiritual sons. He told him that he had practised greater mortification at that time than he had ever been able to compass in later life.

It speaks well for the character of Alexander that in the midst of the magnificence which he loved so well he could maintain relations of a cordial nature with the humble clerk whose aspirations and interests were so far removed from his own. Religion which, in spite of externals, was a strong power in the life of the prelate, as it clearly was in that of the clerk, united them in spiritual bonds which the pressure of this world's trifling could not break.

Often in those days Gilbert, leaving the busy throng of courtiers and servants, would steal away to his chamber, and there spend long hours in prayer. The friendly intercourse which he kept up with his companions, ecclesiastic and lay, was not disturbed by his devotional exercises. A too ostentatious piety often has the effect of repelling beholders rather than of edifying them.

In Gilbert's case his simple humility drew all hearts, if not to the practice of virtue, at least to the admiration of it.

An entertaining story is told of his nocturnal mortifications during the time he was an occupant of the Bishop's sleeping apartment. Probably Alexander was a good sleeper, for it was long before he discovered that Gilbert did not rest as comfortably in bed as he did himself. On one occasion a visitor occupied a third bed in the apartment. During the night he awoke suddenly, and was surprised to see by the faint glimmering of a taper, a ghostly figure moving up and down. It was Gilbert occupied with his nightly devotions, sometimes kneeling, sometimes standing in prayer, but it took the visitor several moments to discover this. In the morning he made Gilbert pay for the fright he had given him by relating the story to the Bishop. He asked him how it was that he kept "a dancer" in his sleeping room, to frighten his unsuspecting guests.

Another story relating to the same time may be narrated here. One day Gilbert persuaded a fellow-clerk to join him in chanting the Divine Office. He spent so much time in ceremonial, in genuflecting, and prostrating before the altar, in intoning with great deliberation and solemnity

of manner, that his companion was quite tired out before the recital was ended, and he "swore that he would never pray with him again."

Gilbert's ordination to the priesthood took place during the early years of his residence in the Bishop's palace. He had long delayed taking upon himself the responsibilities of the sacerdotal state, for the greatness of the honour terrified him. He was actuated by humility, not by cowardice. His fears and scruples were, however, overcome by the Bishop, who commanded him to present himself for ordination. He received Holy Orders from the hand of Alexander, and with the grace of the great sacrament all his anxieties and fears of conscience were laid to rest, and there entered into his soul a deep and lasting peace. He became from that hour a fearless shepherd of souls—a dauntless soldier of Christ. Immediately after ordination the Bishop made use of him as a spiritual physician. The state of the great diocese of Lincoln was at this time one of general disorder and religious tepidity. He looked to Gilbert to help him to instil new religious vigour into the hearts of the people. The Bishop's first step was to make him in the words of a modern chronicler "a sort of penitentiary of the diocese." The

appointment proved Alexander's high estimate of his abilities as a theologian; that he held him in equally high esteem as a director is proved by the fact that he chose him for his own confessor. He then offered him an archdeaconry, but Gilbert was alarmed and refused the gift with some indignation. From the words he used when disclaiming the honour, it is clear that he thought the acceptance of it would limit his liberty of action. He said that worldly honours and preferments often led to the loss of priestly liberty, and that he knew no shorter way to destruction than the acceptance of such benefices—"The service of the Church is good and useful to him who serves her well; there are but few who hear causes for the sake of souls, but many for money."

In 1127 Alexander attended the council which met to deal with reforms needed in Church affairs. Again he counted on Gilbert to help him in the matter of enforcing certain reforms, and again Gilbert declined. It was not that he was afraid of the toil or of the difficulty of the work, but he saw that the means which the Bishop intended to employ in effecting his purpose were not such as he could accept, and, moreover, Gilbert knew that Alexander himself was not naturally qualified to deal with the matter of reform.

Gilbert therefore begged to be allowed to return to Sempringham, and to take up his work amongst his own people. The Bishop, seeing that he was determined not to accept a prominent position in the diocese, gave his consent, and Gilbert returned home.

It was probably in the year 1130 that he left Lincoln. Alexander remained ever his devoted friend, and in later years rendered him great and signal service.

CHAPTER IV

BEGINNING OF THE ORDER OF SEMPRINGHAM

GILBERT went back with great joy to his village home. His father and mother were dead, and he was now lord of the manor of Sempringham. He held both spiritual and temporal power, and his influence was great among his own people and abroad. The village folk had been his scholars in their youth and loved him as a father. He had trained them to virtue, and watched over their material and spiritual well-being. Gilbert could claim as personal friend and patron one of the most powerful bishops of England, and also, should need arise, the help of great nobles, high in favour with the King. Yet the world in which he could so easily have taken his place as a champion of the Church had no charm for him. He felt that his work was not there. Thoughts and doubts concerning his vocation occupied his mind. He was convinced that God called him to some work, higher and more extensive than that which fell to the lot of the ordinary parish priest.

The evils rife in the world were manifest to all who had eyes to see, and were not confined to one class of society. An irresistible attraction drew him to the little village in the fens—a place unknown and despised. To cultivate it, to lead the souls of his people to God, to teach them how to live good and useful lives, would be a work worthy of his ambition. He even thought at this time of resigning, into the hands of the Bishop, his rights as patron of the village churches.

Although disturbed by these and other considerations, Gilbert determined to do nothing hastily. He betook himself to prayer, and quietly awaited some sign whereby God should show to him His will. In the meantime he occupied himself with parish work. Sempringham had changed little during the years of his absence. The young had grown up, the aged had passed away. The thought of founding a monastery in his native village often occurred to him. It would be a simple way of disposing of his money, and at the same time of benefiting his people. The parish church might be attached to it, and all necessary spiritual help secured to the parishioners.

The young people of Sempringham were the boys and girls of his early teaching; he knew them and their families intimately. It was to this

portion of his flock that he looked when forming plans for a religious foundation. The discipline to which he had subjected them in childhood, ought, ere this, to have borne fruit. In the daily discharge of his duties as pastor of souls, he looked amongst the young men for signs of religious vocation. The search was in vain, their ambitions did not rise beyond a desire for improved worldly surroundings, and their spiritual aspirations were confined to the practice of very elementary religious duties. It was after the disappointment of this discovery that Gilbert's mind reverted to the "maidens," and then slowly but steadily a new hope arose.

In treating of Gilbert's boyhood it was suggested that the spirit of chivalry awoke in his soul when the battle was fought between his higher and his lower nature, when he realised that the true knight is equipped with God-given weapons, and that helmet and shield, strength of body and beauty of form, are as nothing in the career of the knight of Christ.

It may be useful and interesting here to consider the causes, remote and immediate, which led to the development of the chivalric spirit, which was inherent in Gilbert's nature. How his vocation turned upon this point will be shown as the story of his life is told.

The spirit of chivalry which was so strong a force in the Middle Ages is difficult to define, nor is it possible to say definitely where it took its rise. To follow it along its course we must go back to the times of our Teutonic forefathers. These Germanic peoples were even in their days of barbarism remarkable for many noble qualities. They were brave and generous, lovers of freedom, of home and country. The virtues of truth, honour, and justice were held in high esteem among them; they were also remarkable for the reverence with which they treated women.

But before and above all, they were warriors. Fighting, in one form or another, was their pursuit and their pleasure. A natural consequence of this was the great value they set upon physical courage. Every father looked to it as the heritage of his son, andthane and freeman alike counted victory in the fight, and honour in the field, as the noblest earthly ambition.

In course of time Christianity came, and although the old warrior spirit remained, the motives shifted. Loftier ideals were sought. With the knowledge of Christian truth came recognition of the fact, that as motives for action human praise and human honour were futile and profitless. The strong Saxon character, untainted by contact with decayed Roman civilisa-

tion, was as a virgin soil, ready for the seed of the divine word. "The new faith, in the brief period of sixty years, took so strong a hold on the nation that it completely revolutionised its life and habits." The most wonderful part of the history is that the change was wrought without the shedding of one drop of blood. A deep personal love of our Blessed Lord soon became a characteristic of the newly converted country; devotion to "our Lady, St Mary," led, ere long, to the bestowal of the name of "Mary's Dowry" upon Saxon England. To a race who had ever respected their womankind, devotion to our Lady came as naturally as the blossoming of flowers in May.

From the above it will be seen that the Saxons were disposed, both by the inheritance of national character, and the circumstances of their times and country, to adopt the ideals of chivalry with no half-hearted fervour. The knight who took up arms in defence of the poor or oppressed was the direct descendant of the thane who had fought—and perchance fallen—in the cause of his lord and king, or in defence of home and kindred.

The position of dignity and honour held by Saxon women in the years preceding the Norman Conquest may be regarded as the natural conse-

quence of the manners and morals prevailing in England at the time. "A galaxy of illustrious women wielded power in Saxon England." Amongst these were Sexburgha, widow of a Wessex king; Ethelfleda, daughter of Alfred the Great; St Edith, who refused to claim a crown, and many another. St Hilda of Whitby ruled as great a gathering in the cloister as the queen in the court. Ladies sat in council in the Saxon witan, and certain abbesses attended the synods of the Church. Whether this last privilege would commend itself to religious women of the present day is questionable; the fact remains, however, to prove the honourable position held by women in the England of pre-Norman days.

With the Conquest came a new order of things. The lawlessness of war, to which the country was subjected, destroyed the very elements of chivalry. The sons and daughters of those who had taken up arms against the invaders were subjected to the injustice of disinheritorance; the children of those who had died in battle were disinherited for ever, "those who had survived their defeats . . . were likewise permanently dispossessed. . . . Lastly, those who had not taken part in any battle were also stripped of everything for having intended to fight; but by a special

favour and clemency they were permitted to hope that after many years . . . not they, but their children . . . might obtain . . . some portion of the paternal inheritance." As before stated, Saxon ladies were bargained for by Norman barons, and William disposed of them at will. That the "position of woman rises and falls with the conformity of men to a moral law" is a truth which few will be found to deny. In the present instance it may account for the condition of helplessness to which women of all classes in England were reduced.

Perhaps their state had never been less honourable than at the time of which we are writing, when Gilbert was striving to penetrate the mists of doubt and uncertainty, in search of knowledge concerning his distinctive vocation. All the chivalry of his nature, inherited from his Saxon forefathers, and nourished in religion and in piety, was roused, as there slowly rose before his mental vision a faint conception of the vocation to which God was calling him. Were these "maidens" who had responded so graciously to his early teaching—were they to be his offering to God? This new hope shone like a star, and as time went on, the light broadened and deepened as he saw more clearly the indication of God's will.

He knew well the spiritual favours bestowed upon these young girls whom he had loved in childhood and taught in youth, and he was fully conscious of the yearning desire of many to give themselves to God in some higher and more perfect way than was possible in their present state of life.

Monasteries for women were, in England at least, few and far between, and usually accessible only to those of gentle birth. Gilbert's parishioners—"simple maidens of Sempringham"—had no hope of admittance into these great religious houses. They did not cherish any expectations on this point, nor had they any inkling of the wonderful way in which the Heavenly Bridegroom was leading their spiritual father to succour and befriend them.

The old chronicler recalls briefly Gilbert's first foundation thus: "There was at that time, when Henry I. was King in England . . . certain secular maidens in Sempringham, whose minds had received the word of God, which he had so often ministered unto them. They were now white to the harvest . . . and longed to cling without hindrance to their Heavenly Bridegroom. . . . When Gilbert failed to find men who wished to live the strict life for God, he deemed it worthy to give his wealth to the use of such

as were poor in spirit, and might claim for him and others the kingdom of Heaven."

When once the will of God was made manifest Gilbert acted without hesitation. Convinced that "the virgins" were to be his offering to the Bridegroom, he set to work to provide the enclosure without which the practice of the strict religious life was impossible. In his perplexity respecting the first steps to be taken he consulted the Bishop of Lincoln.

Alexander entered heartily into all his plans and interests, and recommended him to provide, with as little delay as possible, some secluded asylum for the nuns.

In consequence of this advice Gilbert determined to build against the north wall of the parish church a small convent, which would suffice for temporary needs. This enclosure was built under his direction. Traces of it could be seen as late as the year 1869, when the old wall of St Andrew's Church was taken down and rebuilt.

Whilst their religious home was being erected, Gilbert was preparing the souls of the future inmates for the spiritual life to which they were about to bind themselves. He explained to them the duties of religious, and showed them how to practise while still in their own homes the virtues which would distinguish them as professed nuns.

When the convent was complete Gilbert's spiritual daughters were admitted to the enclosure. The Bishop of Lincoln blessed the monastic dwelling and received their profession. Amongst them was the young girl who had served Gilbert when he dwelt in her father's house. Remembering her connection with the mysterious dream, it would be interesting to know what part she filled in the new community, but history is silent on this point. Gilbert looked upon these "seven virgins" as a sacred trust, and shut them "away from the noise of the world, out of sight of men, since it is easy for tender maidens to be tempted by the wiles of the serpent." They were to the founder as sweet blossoms which the east wind of the world would blight—beautiful lilies to be kept unsullied from the dust of life, so that they might bloom with fresher fragrance in the garden of the Lord. Because they were the brides of Christ, Who was his Lord and Master, he constituted himself their servant, their guide, their defender. He gave them a rule of life to follow that they might thus the more easily please the Heavenly Bridegroom. This rule enjoined the practice of the virtues of chastity, humility, obedience, and charity.

From these lowly beginnings sprang the Order which a few years later numbered hundreds of

members. As soon as the nuns were installed in their new dwelling, it became evident that it would be difficult to maintain the enclosure. How were they to provide themselves with the necessities of life? To seek such things themselves was impossible, and the alternative of admitting secular persons into the enclosure equally so. To meet the immediate need Gilbert engaged certain village girls to buy food and other things for the nuns. These they passed into the convent through a window in the cloister.

The plan did not in all instances work satisfactorily, and both founder and religious realised that the arrangement must necessarily be temporary. The most natural solution of the problem would have been to add lay-sisters to the community without delay, but, for some reason which is not apparent, Gilbert hesitated to do this. He took as it were one step at a time on his Heaven-appointed way. The Divine Guide illuminated the pathway immediately in front of him; around and ahead all was darkness. This waiting upon Providence was a characteristic of Gilbert throughout life.

In devoting his money and his time to the formation of a religious community in his native village, he had no ulterior motive. Certain girls of his parish were visibly called to a life of

sublime contemplation. The circumstances of the times were such that existing monasteries were closed against them. Gilbert, the knight-spiritual, stepped into the breach, and out of his own patrimony built and endowed an enclosure. Of the branches which were early grafted on to the parent stem, the founder had at first no thought or idea.

The biographer may be excused the reiteration of these the first facts connected with Gilbert's undertaking, as upon the knowledge of them depends a just appreciation of his work.

Whilst still troubled about providing for material needs, he received a visit from a great friend, the Cistercian Abbot, William of Rievaulx. To him Gilbert spoke of the new foundation, and of his difficulty. The Abbot strongly disapproved of his temporary arrangement. He said that the village girls were not suitable serving-maids for cloistered religious, and that secular women "who wandered whither they pleased" should be debarred from all intercourse with them, for by their gossip and frivolous manners they might distract the nuns and even enkindle in their hearts a love of the world which they had renounced.

In the company of the Abbot were certain lay-brothers. These he pointed out to his friend,

and showed him that lay-sisters formed on the same model would exactly fill the need that existed in his new congregation. They could act as intermediaries between the world and the cloister, and at the same time work out their own salvation. Gilbert determined to act upon this suggestion for in it he saw the indication of God's will.

Soon after the departure of the monks, Gilbert proposed to the serving-maids that they should turn their labour to spiritual profit. He showed them that they could secure this by consecrating their lives to God in the religious state. He explained to them what their duties would be, how they would differ from the choir sisters, and how, if they were faithful to their vocation, they would merit the reward promised to those who should leave all things for Christ's sake.

The girls gladly fell in with his views. They desired to begin at once their new way of life, but the founder prudently decided to wait. He knew how necessary it was that they should have a full and complete knowledge of what religious life meant. They were unacquainted with monasticism, and had never, before Gilbert's proposal, even heard of lay-sisters. The discipline and rule of the monastery would necessarily press heavily upon them. The holy founder was

determined that they should deliberately count the cost. He put before them in detail the deprivations they would endure, the obligations they must incur, and the responsibilities to which they would be liable. With these he bade them balance the spiritual profits. Finally he told them that for a year they must carefully consider the matter, and at the end of that time he would take their decision.

The old Sempringham chronicler, writing of this time, makes the following rather quaint remarks: "The spirit of neophytes must be proved, that Satan may not change himself into an angel of light, and the wolf may not put on the sheepskin, the sparrow the feathers of the hawk, the rustic ass the limbs of the lion."

At the end of the allotted time the "neophytes" were found to be steadfast in their resolve. Accordingly Gilbert admitted them into the monastery, and henceforth lay-sisters formed an important part of the religious family of Sempringham. As time went on the community increased in numbers and fervour. The founder himself ministered to the spiritual needs of the nuns, and from his own patrimony supplied their temporal wants. He endowed the monastery, or priory, as it was afterwards called, with certain lands which adjoined the enclosure. The

produce and profits went to the maintenance of the nuns, and the upkeep of their house.

Again came difficulties. Hired labourers were disorderly and hard to manage. Gilbert felt that he could not cope with them, and they were quite outside the jurisdiction of the nuns. As in all former needs, he betook himself to prayer. In this instance enlightenment of mind came at once, and action speedily followed. Remembrance of the Cistercian visit suggested the idea of a further affiliation, and in a very short time lay-brothers were added to the Sempringham community.

He dealt in a more summary manner with the men than with the maidens, for he "took" as lay-brothers youths whom he thought suitable from various classes of village life. Some of these were his own parishioners whom he had known and supported from childhood, others were of the lowest order, fugitive villeins, churls, or serfs, who freed themselves by taking religious vows, and the third class consisted of beggars, "the poor and outcast," whom he sought "in the streets and lanes of the city," and compelled to come in. Truly it needed the influence of a saint to control such a gathering! Gilbert's gentle influence, firm will, and religious teaching brought order into this strange community and

for many years the lay-brothers of Sempringham lived holily and kept the rule of their Order. Trouble came from this quarter at last—the greatest trial of Gilbert's life—but that was long years after the early days of the first foundation.

Thus the affiliation to the Order of lay-sisters and brothers had its origin in Gilbert's care for his nuns. Indeed, from the time when God's will was clearly made manifest to him he became a true knight in their service. He worked for their maintenance and their honour, he fought for their privileges, and he ever shielded them from the malice of the world; in short, they were throughout life the objects of his tenderest care and most devoted solicitude.

CHAPTER V

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

It was during the last years of the reign of Henry I. that Gilbert formed and founded his little community. In 1135 Stephen came to the throne. Discontent which had for some time been smouldering soon broke into flame. Unrest grew to rebellion.

The new King had not sufficient power to check the haughty arrogance of the nobles. As time went on his troubles of government increased. David of Scotland, who had sworn to uphold the claim of his niece Matilda to the throne of England, invaded the country.

In 1138 the Battle of the Standard was fought. Gilbert de Gant, our saint's feudal lord, espoused Stephen's cause, and claimed military service from his vassals.

There was grief and lamentation in many a humble homestead when, in obedience to the summons, a little band of fathers, husbands, and

brothers set out from the fenside village to join forces with their overlord at Lincoln. The mourning which saddened the first parting was, however, slight in comparison with the gloom which settled upon the hamlet when as the year wore on messenger after messenger brought news of death and desolation.

In seasons of difficulty and distress Gilbert was to his people father, physician, friend, and guide. They flocked to him for help. With a patron's power and privilege he took all to his great heart—the sorrow-laden and weary, the hungry and the homeless. To the former he gave solace; to the latter, alms and protection.

Sempringham stood off the world's highway, and thus escaped many of the horrors of warfare. To the east the great fen stretched away in solitary grandeur to the sea. Its flat expanse of water and marsh was unbroken save by an occasional church spire or turret which rose suddenly out of the swamp, and stood clear-cut and dark against a low background of sky and level land.

Far away to the north the smoke from burning town or hamlet would, ever and anon, blacken the sky at noonday, and often when night shrouded the earth in gloom the glow of these

devastating fires lit up the horizon and illumined the neighbouring darkness.

The noise of battle, borne on the breeze, struck terror into the hearts of the villagers. Sometimes it was the echo of a call to arms which broke the stillness, sometimes the noise of tramp and tread. The wounded soldier dragged himself home in search of healing, or of rest; fugitives sought a hiding-place in village haunt or lonely fen. Save for happenings such as these, the peace of Sempringham life was unbroken.

The fields around "wanting the scythe" corrupted in their "own fertility." The corn lay on the ground, trampled and destroyed. The unmown hay rotted in the meadows.

The country was in a state of anarchy, and in the universal slaying "no distinction was made between English and Norman," for those who carried out the work of destruction were usually foreign mercenaries. Castles were besieged and pillaged, villages and homesteads given up to flames, whilst many of the inhabitants were either put to the sword or cast into the dungeons of fortified castles.

In the midst of this lawlessness, and whilst scenes of bloodshed and cruelty were being enacted almost within sight and hearing, St Gilbert's domain remained tranquil and calm.

The village folk followed their daily avocations as best they could, and within the humble cloister adjoining St Andrew's Church, hymns of praise and petition went up with unremitting fervour and regularity to the God of battles and the Father of the poor.

Nevertheless, Gilbert was often sorely troubled, sometimes because of the general desolation, sometimes through fear for the safety of his religious family.

The thought of dangers around him, and dread of the results of prolonged strife, deprived him of all comfort. His refuge was in prayer. Without intermission he besought God's mercy for his unhappy country.

One night, after hours of unusual anxiety and depression, he had a dream. Divine consolation was given him in sleep. He thought he saw a scrip or scroll on which was written a list of years. At first he understood these numbers to mean years of war yet to come, but it was revealed to him that the figures included the years already spent. He saw with joy that the time of trial allotted by the Judge was nearly over.

Gilbert awoke consoled and reassured. So convinced was he of the truth of the revelation that he put away all solicitude as to the future,

and set about his work as though the peace which so soon followed was already secured.

It was during this period of distress that Gilbert de Gant gave "three carucates of land in Sempringham to build a priory near the church in honour of the Blessed Virgin." Whether the gift was made in compensation for the loss he had unwillingly brought upon his vassals, or from a simple motive of piety, it is impossible to determine. That it should have been made at such a time is remarkable.

The fame of Jocelin's son and successor had gone abroad. His position was unique, for he ruled his people with a twofold power: that of the priest, and that of the feudal lord. Men talked of him and of his work. He in the meantime kept watch over his little flock, and prayed for light to lead them aright.

In describing the peace and seclusion of the first Sempringham enclosure, one chronicler quaintly remarks: "In the midst of all this trouble the convent was holding its even course; in the darkest times there are ever some little nooks in the Church where there is peace."

The city of Lincoln, with which Sempringham was closely connected, was during the whole of the civil war a centre of strife and discord. The Bishop, Alexander, was "a mighty builder."

He had erected and fortified three strong castles, which he said were necessary for the safety of his see.

The influence he thus acquired raised the jealousy of neighbouring lords and barons, who complained of him to King Stephen. They said that Alexander, as well as his uncle, the Bishop of Salisbury, "had built their castles . . . not that they might give this kingdom to the King, but that they might take away the royal dignity from him, and lie in wait for the crown."

Stephen's suspicions were aroused, and an early opportunity was taken of arresting the bishops. They were taken prisoners at Oxford on a charge of breaking the King's peace. Both were forced to surrender their castles.

Alexander was afterwards allowed to retire to Lincoln, where he took up, with renewed ardour, his episcopal charge. The death of his uncle of Salisbury occurred soon after, and was a great blow to him, for he had been devotedly attached to Roger.

With Gilbert of Sempringham, Alexander ever maintained friendly relations. He aided him in his work in the most sympathetic and practical way. When overwhelmed by the trials of his life, and troubled with the knowledge of disorder rife in his vast diocese, Alexander would revert

in thought to the village of Sempringham, where there was springing up a spiritual garden of great promise and beauty. It seemed to him like an oasis in the desert of religious desolation around.

He determined to give to the nuns a little island in the fens called Haverholme, which he had lately offered to the Cistercians. The Abbot of Fountains had accepted the gift, and sent a party of monks to put up the necessary buildings, and make preparations for the foundations.

For some reason not stated, the situation and conditions did not please them, and they refused to remain. The Bishop, in no way offended, gave them another property, which they named "Louth Park." It was the rejected island which Alexander in 1139 determined to bestow upon the Sempringham community. There does not appear to have been any thought of refusal either on Gilbert's part or on that of the nuns.

The foundation was made, but it is not evident who bore the cost of building and other works. The deed of gift, which is explicit and clear, makes no mention of these. Probably Gilbert still held himself responsible for all the debts of the Order.

The following are the words in which Alexander registers his gift : " The Blessed God

and our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has opened the eyes of His mercy upon us, has lighted up the eyes of our mind, and inclined our heart to the necessity of His handmaids, the faithful nuns, of wonderful religion, who serve Christ the Lord in love under the charge and teaching of Gilbert the priest. Seizing on the narrow life, the strict life, the life of the monks of the Cistercian religion, so far as the weakness of their sex permits, they strive to keep it, and they do keep it. Since they have not a fitting place for their religion, by the inspiration of the grace of God, we have given them one suitable for their way of life. For we have given them the island once called Haverholme, which is now the island of St Mary . . . with all things which pertain unto it; in meadow and in land which is fit for cultivation, in marsh, in waters, and in other things, as far as the bounds of the island, with two mills, free and quit from all human and secular service, in everlasting possession. . . . This favour we have shown to the handmaids of Christ for the consolation and help of our mother church (of Lincoln), for ourselves and our friends, for the soul of King Henry, and of my Uncle Roger, who was Bishop of Salisbury, and for the souls of my father and mother, and my dead friends. Be ye mindful of our dearest in your prayers,

that the Lord may have mercy on you. Amen." From the terms of this document it is clear that Gilbert's nuns followed, in the early years of their foundation, a rule similar to that of the Cistercians, but it was not until 1148 that with the help of the great St Bernard the institutes of the Order were definitely drawn up.

The nuns at Haverholme suffered great hardships in the early years of the foundation. One Simon Tushet, their "brother in Christ," was a true friend to them, and gave them lands in Ashby, "fearing that they would lack where-withal to live." This kind deed was done in 1140, the year of the battle between King Stephen and Earl Ranulf of Chester.

After the foundation at Haverholme, Gilbert again became alarmed for the safety of his religious family. His intention had been to found a convent, not an order. He had understood his vocation to mean the dedication of time, service, and talents to the protection and maintenance of a single community.

With the increase of members a new state of things was created. A second enclosure had been completed, and with it new liabilities arose. Gilbert saw that unless he opposed the incoming tide of public favour there would soon be demands for further extension.

His work as a founder had been no sinecure. The position of women in England was one of insecurity and peril. It was many years since Edith, the daughter of St Margaret of Scotland, had been sent to Romsey Abbey to shield her from undesirable suitors, riotous nobles, and feudal foes; yet in the reign of her husband's successor English women were still threatened with similar dangers. Monasteries continued to be looked upon as havens of refuge. Noble families sought asylum in them for their wards and their daughters. The custom of admitting applicants of this sort was not without danger to the religious.

Gilbert's task of granting or refusing demands for entrance was neither easy nor pleasant. On the one hand he was obliged to consider the welfare and the wishes of those within; on the other the safety of fugitives seeking escape from dangers of which the present age has no conception.

In the year 1140, the city of Lincoln was sacked, and the King taken prisoner. Gilbert de Gant, who had fought valiantly and faithfully for Stephen, shared his captivity.

Strange to say, civil war did not impede the progress or development of religious life. Monasteries multiplied and flourished. Gilbert's

burden of anxiety continued to increase. Noble and wealthy patrons offered money and land for new monasteries. He did not think it advisable to burden himself with additional priories, and yet he scrupled to refuse gifts offered for the service of God.

In the perplexity of mind attendant upon conflicting interests, he bethought himself of his old friends the Cistercians. As they had aided him before, so might they help him again. After commending his cause to God in long and fervent prayer, Gilbert resolved to go to the great Cistercian house of Citeaux, and there seek counsel from the first superiors of the Order.

The General Chapter was held each year about September 14. Gilbert so planned his journey as to reach his destination at that time, in order to lay his case before the assembled abbots.

Many monasteries of the Cistercian rule had sprung up in England during the reign of Stephen. Gilbert was on terms of intimate friendship with several of the superiors, and probably journeyed in their company to Citeaux.

The idea of asking the Cistercians to take over the management of his Order was slowly but surely forming itself into a fixed resolve in his mind. Before he left England he had finally

determined to use all his influence to induce them to become responsible for its government and administration.

The congregation of Citeaux was an offshoot of the great Benedictine body. The monastery there became the mother house of a large religious family, and was founded in 1098 by St Robert of Molesme, a Benedictine monk who was not satisfied with the rule of his order as practised in the monasteries of France.

St Stephen Harding, an Englishman by birth, was largely instrumental in the formation of the new congregation, and is looked upon as the second founder of the Order.

Abbot Gasquet says that the first Cistercians "struck out a new line, which was a still further departure from the ideal of St Benedict than was the Cluniac system. The Cistercians, while strictly maintaining the notion that each monastery was a family endowed with the principles of fecundity, formed themselves into an Order in the sense of an organised congregation under the perpetual eminence of the house of Citeaux, and with yearly chapters, at which all superiors were bound to attend."

Citeaux was situated in the diocese of Chalons. When the first monks went there, the place was dreary and desolate. The spot they chose for

habitation was in the centre of a thick forest. Wild beasts roamed through the lonely woods undisturbed, save by an occasional huntsman, or perchance an unoffending peasant.

When St Gilbert arrived there in the September of 1147, the face of Nature had been changed. A fair monastery stood in a vale of exceeding beauty. Stretching away on every side were fields and orchards gleaming in the autumn sunlight. Like protecting ramparts the great trees of the forest stood sombre and grand.

The council at Citeaux with which we are concerned was attended by three hundred abbots, amongst whom were two persons of unusual eminence and sanctity—Pope Eugenius III. and St Bernard of Clairvaux.

Gilbert was warmly welcomed by the monks. He made many friends, and was the recipient of an unbounded hospitality. To the abbots assembled in council he gave a full account of his religious family, its origin, and its growth. He explained the difficulties connected with the work, and made known his hopes as to the future. He begged the Cistercians to undertake the direction of the two existing houses, and to regulate for future foundations.

After deliberately weighing the proposals

made, and discussing the circumstances which led to the formation of the Sempringham community, the abbots gave their decision, which was emphatic and conclusive. They refused to accept the charge. Gilbert was bitterly disappointed. In forming his little community he had used the Cistercian rule as a model, thinking that the new branch would be more fertile than the older Benedictine stock. Latterly he had persuaded himself that the similarity in design would go far towards inclining the abbots to adopt the infant congregation.

Pope Eugenius, who had taken his place in the chapter as a simple monk, told him that it was God's will that he should govern his Order himself.

Gilbert's feelings may be better imagined than described. He had thought so long about transferring the burden of his responsibility that he had come to look upon it as almost a fact accomplished. Now all hope of such an ending to his troubles was over. The old burden pressed with additional weight, and in the outlook there was no gleam of light. No respite could be expected save that of death.

Gilbert was too brave a soldier of Christ to refuse the cross. Even while it pressed its heaviest he made his act of resignation. Then

a deep peace filled his soul, and with it came great joy of heart.

The days he spent at Citeaux thenceforth were filled with consolation. Pope Eugenius treated him as an intimate friend; he spoke to him long and confidentially of the affairs of the Church in England. So strong an affection and esteem did he conceive for Gilbert that he regretted not having known him sooner, so that he might have made him Archbishop of York, instead of Henry Murdac, the Cistercian Abbot of Fountains, who had been the Pope's fellow-monk and disciple of St Bernard at Clairvaux. Gilbert was happy in having escaped this dignity, for the work which the Archbishop was forced to undertake would have been utterly repugnant to him.

The great St Bernard, who had done so wonderful a work in the world, healing schism and triumphing over heresy, persuaded Gilbert to visit him at Clairvaux, in Champagne. In the peaceful seclusion of the cloister they discussed the new Order, its organisation and constitutions.

It was thirty years since Bernard, accompanied by twelve monks, had gone to Clairvaux. In those days the deep glen, shut in by steep and rugged mountains, was called the "Valley of Wormwood." The industry and talent of the monks soon changed it into the "Clara Vallis"

—"the Happy Valley," or "Valley of Glory."

Gilbert spent there many days of holy joy. With the assistance of the saintly abbot he drew up the rules of the Order of Sempringham.

They conferred together on things of God, and cemented in prayer and spiritual converse the bonds of an unfailing friendship. Gilbert led, whilst at Clairvaux, a life very like that of the brethren. He prayed in their choir, ate in their refectory, and when the rule allowed, mingled in familiar intercourse with them. If he did not share their daily labour in the fields, it was from no want of goodwill on his part. As he wandered by the banks of the River Aube, which glittered and sparkled on its way through the verdant pastures, he drank in much of the Cistercian spirit, the ascetic beauty of which appealed to him as strongly as did the quiet loveliness of that "Happy Valley."

When the constitutions were complete, they were submitted to Pope Eugenius III. He read them carefully, and gave his approbation. As this first version of the rule contains clauses referring to the priests or canons of Sempringham, it is clear that the founder, whilst at Clairvaux, finally decided to receive such into the Order.

The question of this incorporation cost him much anxious thought. Many abuses prevailed in the Church. The secular clergy were exposed to social dangers from which regulars were shielded by rule and enclosure. On account of this it had become a common custom for members of cathedral chapters to live together under a rule of life not unlike that observed in monastic institutions. Priests thus living were called canons regular.

They formed themselves generally on the rule of St Augustine, and had become known in England as Augustinian canons and Premonstratensian canons.

No doubt St Bernard's counsel helped Gilbert to draw up the clauses referring to the priests of the Order. It will be seen later how wise these rules were, and how they enabled the members to combine the true monastic spirit with the larger liberty necessary for parish priests.

The founder's chivalric ideal pervades that part of the rule referring to the male members; it is, as it were, the keynote of the whole.

What did St Bernard, the great Cistercian ascetic, think of this? Doubtless he recognised the guidance of the Divine Spirit, and saw how the distinctive holiness of the founder was cast

like a heavenly smile over the rule he was preparing for his brethren.

Gilbert's idea was that the priests he meant to attach to his Order should devote themselves primarily to the care of the nuns. This was the first object of their religious vocation. They were also to overlook and direct the labour of the lay-brothers, and might, should need arise, occupy themselves with other good works.

The plan was commended and approved by Pope Eugenius. The chronicle of the time tersely sums up Gilbert's work at Clairvaux in the following words: "To the nuns he gave the rule of Blessed Benedict; to the learned brothers the rule of St Augustine; to all the example of Christ and His saints. . . . He culled statutes and customs of divers churches and monasteries as though he was gathering the fairest flowers, and chose out those which he judged the most necessary and fitting for the weakness of men. So great was his care, that he took not only great and needful matters, but, like the angel ascending and descending upon the ladder of Jacob, he did not leave out even the smallest and most humble. All these things he entrusted to writing, that they might be remembered, and he called them by the appropriate name 'Scripta.'"

Before leaving France, Gilbert had the

privilege of meeting another prelate of great virtue and holiness. This was St Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh. He had left his distant Irish see with the hope of meeting the Pope at Clairvaux; but travelling was slow and difficult, and communication between distant friends often impossible, so that the Pope, not knowing of Malachy's coming, had left Clairvaux before he arrived. The disappointment of the aged Archbishop found some compensation, however, in the joy of meeting St Bernard, his beloved friend and spiritual father, in whose arms he had long hoped to die. Gilbert spent many happy days in the company of these two chosen friends of God. In after-life he looked back upon those days as upon a time of unbroken peace. They spoke together of divine things, and as Gilbert watched the heavenly light irradiate the faces of his companions he felt that it was indeed good to be there. His soul drew refreshment and inspiration from the intercourse which served as spiritual sustenance when forced to tread the path of desolation.

St Malachy's days were drawing to a close, and those Gilbert spent with him were almost his last on earth. The hour of departure came all too soon. The three saints met for the last time. A touching little ceremony took place. The

saintly Bishop of Armagh and the great St Bernard presented parting gifts to their English friend. St Malachy gave him an abbot's staff, deeming, no doubt, the abbatial office his portion in the immediate future. St Bernard also gave him a staff, in his case it may have been intended to symbolise a founder's power; he added to this gift a maniple and stole. And so they parted.

Gilbert set off to return to England. It was near the end of October, 1148. St Malachy died on 2nd November, in the arms of St Bernard, and was buried in St Mary's Church at Clairvaux.

CHAPTER VI

THE RULE OF SEMPRINGHAM

GILBERT came back to England inspired with new zeal and courage, ready to resume the charge of his spiritual daughters and determined to make his institute as far as was possible a perfect garden of the Lord. How gladly must the nuns of Sempringham have welcomed him home, and how great must have been the consolation he enjoyed in seeing the fervour with which they devoted themselves to the duties of their religious state !

News travelled slowly in those days, but rumours had reached England before Gilbert's return telling how the great St Bernard of Clairvaux was helping him to established firmly his religious Order in England. This added new fame to the work which had already become illustrious on account of the learning and sanctity of the founder. Offers of money and land, for the building of monasteries, which had been made to him before he went to France, were now

repeated and multiplied. Bishop Alexander of Lincoln was dead, but his successor, Robert of Chesney, was Gilbert's firm friend, and had already shown himself a benefactor of the new religious family. "The nobles of England, earls and barons, seeing and approving the work of the Lord, gave to the holy father Gilbert many lands and possessions; first in so doing was Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, and lastly King Henry II." These benefactions extended over many years, but were most remarkable in the days immediately following the founder's return from France.

Shortly after this he set about the work of seeking priests willing to undertake the care of his two convents of nuns.

He found his first spiritual sons where he had vainly sought them years before. Certain youths from amongst his early scholars had received Holy Orders. These were ready to join with him, and were willing to accept any method of life he should propose.

The rule he had first chosen for them was founded on that of St Augustine, but as it enjoined little beyond the common life, and renunciation of property, Gilbert added other statutes taken from the Cistercian code, the Augustinian customs, and the Premonstratensian rule.

When not employed in ministering to the needs of the nuns, or in fulfilling their own religious obligations, they were to occupy themselves either with literary labours, or in work connected with the cultivation and improvement of the priory lands.

The founder laid special stress upon the necessity of his priests being learned men. In the first instance, he only received such as could claim this distinction; later, youths were admitted into the priories preparatory to profession, but only those who reached a given standard were finally accepted. In this point, Gilbert considered, lay the difference between his religious and the ordinary monk. The latter might achieve perfection without the knowledge of letters, but the former could not efficiently fulfil his vocation without having had considerable scholastic training.

The ideal which the founder had formed, and which he hoped to realise in his sons, was high and noble. They were to be learned that they might the more readily guide the nuns up the difficult heights of sanctity; priests, to enable them to give spiritual help on the journey; and "men, that they might protect women." In words such as these, we get a glimpse of the knightly character which Gilbert always cher-

ished. References in the same strain constantly occur in the rule and show how the founder strove to impress upon this part of his Order their distinctive mark.

The religious dress which he gave the canons was more elaborate than that of the nuns or lay-brethren. It consisted of a black cassock, a white scapular, a white cloak lined with lamb's-wool, and a white linen cope. Each canon had two pairs of long gaiters reaching above the knees, also night and day shoes of red leather. The linen cope was worn in chapter and at all religious services, and in it the canons were buried.

Two meals a day were allowed in summer; in winter, when the days were shorter, only one.

The daily routine of monastic life was followed by priests and nuns alike. The lay-sisters and brothers gave more time to manual labour, and less to prayer. When possible they attended the public functions.

The rule followed by the choir sisters was mainly Cistercian. Contemplation and prayer occupied the greater part of the day, and much of the night. In the intervals, study, reading, needlework, or light manual labour filled in the time.



GILBERTINE NUN (FROM 'ENGLISH MONASTIC LIFE')

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They wore a black habit, with a white veil or hood, and in choir a long white cuculla or mantle. The lay-sisters instead of the mantle wore sheep-skin cloaks and long hoods.

The choir sisters had charge of the library, which was for the use of both monasteries. The rule especially laid down that all books and other valuables were to be in the care of the nuns. With the help of the lay-sisters they also undertook the charge of the canons' wardrobe. One of the choir nuns supervised the cooking, all of which was done in their kitchen. This office was changed every week. The food for the canons and lay-brothers was passed through a window in the cloister to the brother appointed to receive it. He was called the "brother of the window." The "brother of the hostel"—the gardener—passed vegetables, fruit, water, etc., into the nuns' quarters in the same way. In accordance with the Cistercian rule, no meat was eaten in the Gilbertine houses except by the sick.

The preparation of wool and the weaving of garments for the community formed an important item in the list of labours which were carried on within the priory precincts. The sheep pastures belonging to the Gilbertines were valuable and extensive. The level land which lay immediately around and south-west of the fen country

stretched onwards and upwards like the wandering waters of a vast green sea. It covered the undulating slopes and vales of Northamptonshire and was lost in the woodlands round Towcester on the south, and the outskirts of Rockingham Forest to the north. Many of the Gilbertine convents grew up on the borders of these pastures or in the marshy lands of the fens, which produced little corn and much grass. This rich meadow-land was invaluable to the monasteries for sheep pasture, and the Gilbertines became in course of time "a great wool-growing community." As the Order increased in size and importance, the wool trade became the chief means of support for its members, but this was long after the time of which we are writing. From the first days of the foundation at Sempringham the nuns had been employed "in preparing wool from their own sheep for the general use of the Order." This industry must have occupied much time and labour and was shared probably by choir and lay-sisters alike.

Any description of the rule of Sempringham which did not give some account of the lay-brothers would be incomplete. They formed a very important part of the Order. The circumstances under which they were affiliated have already been described. They were responsible

for the food supplies, and the revenues of the priory lands were dependent upon their labours.

Their rule, also, was severe. They lived on the monastery grounds, in granges, or small farm-houses, each of which became a sort of small convent. The brothers were bound by rules suitable to their work and condition. Minute regulations safeguarded the three vows and the authority of a head brother or grainger appointed by the prior of each house ensured good discipline.

During the early years at Sempringham and at Haverholme, the brothers had been the only male members of the congregation. They did not view the coming of the canons with any favour. The reason of this will be easily understood. It meant more work for them, and at the same time a lowering of their prestige. The Cistercian monks worked side by side with the lay-brothers, but the Gilbertine canons, except in extreme cases, did no manual labour, and they acted, moreover, as masters or overseers.

The dress of the lay-brothers included three white tunics, a grey cloak lined with rough skins reaching to the thigh, a cloth cape and hood, "the colour of which mattered not, so long as it became true religious." Special regulations were laid down as to the supply of clothing in

times of heavy work, or for any other occasion when an extra supply should be required.

A curious description of the complete Order is given by St Gilbert's biographer. He says : " It is the chariot of Aminadab, that is of a willing people, of the voluntary poor of Christ. It has two sides, one of men, another of women, four wheels, two of men, clerk and lay, and two of women, lettered and unlettered. Two oxen draw the chariot, the clerkly and monastic discipline of the blessed Augustine and the holy Benedict. Father Gilbert guides the chariot over places rough and smooth, over the heights and in the depths. The way by which they go is narrow, but the path is eternal life."

The Cistercian influence is clearly discernible in the clauses regulating the services of the Church. These were in striking contrast to the complexity which characterised certain parts of the rule.

The utmost simplicity was enjoined in the decoration of the church and altar. Limitations were laid down as to the number of lights to be burnt on the altar, exceptions being made for Candlemas Day and other specified feasts. In the nuns' churches no organ was allowed, nor, indeed, any music save that of the simple chant. The same rigid simplicity was observed in church

decorations, and seems even to have been enforced with regard to vestments and coverings for the sacred vessels. Silk was not to be used for these things unless it was presented to the convent as a gift. Our modern ideas of respect for all that relates to the service of the altar do not incline us to sympathise with, nor fully to understand these last restrictions. Silk was an expensive luxury in the twelfth century, which no doubt accounts to some extent for the prohibition put upon its purchase, yet it was the age when all that was rich and beautiful in art was being brought to bear upon the building of churches and cathedrals, when the wealth of spiritual aspirations found their climax in the wonderful buildings which Montalembert has so eloquently described as “soaring heavenwards with their towers and spires as though they would carry with them to the throne of God a universal homage of love and victorious faith from all Christian hearts.” Such was the wonderful cathedral of Lincoln, which St Hugh of Avalon built close to the homes of Gilbert’s children.

Throughout his rule as throughout his life, Gilbert ever made clear the fact that the nuns were to be the chief care of both canons and brothers. This principle he distinctly emphasises in the following words : “ Our brothers, the first

and last, who have vowed vows to God, and bound themselves with the chain of the profession of our religion, shall help the needs of the handmaids and brides of Christ with all their care. If they have ministered unto them faithfully they shall receive mercy and favour from Christ Himself."

CHAPTER VII

THE GILBERTINE PRIORIES

To understand fully the work of St Gilbert's life, some knowledge of his monasteries or priories is necessary. Reference has already been made to the enclosure provided for the seven maidens of Sempringham. It has also been shown how that first foundation was extended by Gilbert de Gant. This Norman noble was a staunch friend to Gilbert and to his Order. The land on which the priory was built was included in his gift to the Gilbertines, but he had not the power to make the gift free of service; another Gilbert, a descendant of his, completed the grant and "gave it in eleemosynam," that is, in free ecclesiastical tenure.

The Priory of Sempringham grew up under the immediate direction of the founder. It was built during the time when he was engaged in the administration of the affairs, spiritual and temporal, of his first religious daughters. Many maidens craved admittance into the congrega-

tion, but in those days few could be received, for the enclosure was small and accommodation inadequate.

When at length a patron appeared, willing to give land for a new monastery, Gilbert set to work with whole-hearted zeal to design and build a more suitable religious home. He chose the site, and made the plans; he selected the materials, and directed the workmen. Early and late he was on the scene, now cheering the lay-brothers, who worked as masons, carpenters, or labourers, now taking a turn himself at any work where help was needed. He superintended all, sometimes correcting, more often commending.

Thus, under the Master's eye, the buildings rose in monastic beauty. The church of the nuns stood in the centre of the pile. It was, like all the Gilbertine churches, a dignified yet simple edifice. The founder decreed that the brethren should always build the nuns' churches with care, and "as well as they knew how." He set them a noble example. The architectural splendour of the Priory Church of St Mary was limited by the cost; to the labour and love of the Master there was no limit. As he watched its growth he rejoiced. Within a stone's-throw the spouses of Christ were waiting. This sanctuary should be the "garden enclosed," where He

Who "feedeth amongst the lilies" would seek His beloved.

In addition to the rules directing the building of churches, the founder also insisted that the nuns' quarters, consisting of dormitories, refectory, chapter-house, kitchen, cloister, etc., should be "better built and more spacious" than those of the brethren. To quote his own words, these were to be "more beautiful and more honourable than those of the men."

The Gilbertines did not include teaching in the work of their Order, consequently no auditorium or parlour was necessary for school purposes; the regulations restricting its use refer only to the receiving of visitors. Stringent recommendations were given to restrict the intercourse which took place between secular persons and the religious. The rule said: "Since the ancient enemy proposes to himself to have restitution in the parlour for the loss inflicted on him in the chapter, we will that the entry into the parlour be rare and necessary, and we utterly interdict chattering and vain speech among brothers and sisters alike."

The guest-house had a private oratory, and stood in a secluded part of the garden, "apart from the paths and view of the nuns." The lay-sisters attended to the needs of the guests, and

the nuns were allowed to converse with them at stated times, following special rules. They were occasionally allowed to see visitors in the parlour; these visits were rare, even in the case of personal friends and relations. When "by chance some noble woman has come, secular or religious, and if anything is to be spoken which cannot be indicated by signs, we allow speech concerning the domestic matters of our profession." No guest was allowed, according to the first rule, to stay longer than one night at any priory (later dispensations allowed three days), nor could they enter any of the nuns' buildings without leave from the prioress.

An interesting account is preserved of trouble which arose after Gilbert's death respecting this rule, and although it is outside the scope of the present chapter, which purports to deal with the Order as it was in the founder's lifetime, yet the interest of the incident may be sufficient excuse for its introduction here. In a letter of King Henry III. to the Sheriff of Yorkshire, dated 1272, the following passage occurs: "The masters and brothers of the Order of Sempringham have complained that secular women go to the houses of the Order and stay there more than three nights, which they ought not to do without special permission from the Master. Agnes de

Vesey has been to the house of Watton with a great number of women and dogs and other things, which have interfered with the devotions of the nuns and sisters." The King, the Order being then under his protection, bids the sheriff go in person to Agnes de Vesey, and warn her not to go to Watton or to any other priory without special leave from the Master. This Agnes de Vesey was a descendant of the founder of Watton Priory, Eustace Fitzjohn, and caused the Order trouble on other scores, as well as that of enforced hospitality. She was the inveterate enemy of the Prior of Malton, and sued him in the law-courts for offences contrary "to the charter granted by her predecessors," and she also caused the prior and his canons, with lay-brothers, to be taken, imprisoned, and maltreated "in the common way, near the Chapel of St Leonard, Malton"—a striking example of the inconveniences arising from patrons and their descendants.

The dwellings of the canons and lay-brothers usually opened off the cloister at the south side of the church. They had their own chapel. In the early days of the Order the canons and brothers attended the nuns' church, which was separated into two distinct parts by a wall down the centre from east to west.

The strictest rules governed intercourse between the two houses, and a high wall and moat encircled all. This barrier between the world and the cloister was always kept in good repair. It was enacted in the constitutions that three marks should be taken yearly from "the pennies of the nuns to shut them in with moat and wall or hedge, until they are secure. No expense shall be spared until the view of all is shut out from them." No person was allowed entrance into the nuns' garden without urgent cause, and the gate through which carts and waggons entered was always kept protected with bolts and bars "and very faithful guards."

The lay-brothers dwelt for the most part at the granges. Those, however, who were employed in or about the priory lived in the canons' quarters. They were dispensed from attending the Night Office, and were allowed certain other mitigations of the rule. Yet, in spite of this, their life was very austere, and if faithfully adhered to was calculated to lead them to high perfection.

Before the Order had been established many years, Gilbert departed from his original idea as to the exclusive mission of the canons. He did not however change the rule, for it will be remembered that it was so worded as to allow of

adaptation. The founder consented to enlarge the scope of work permissible to one class of members.

To account for this change of action we must bear in mind first, his habit of moving slowly in all that concerned his vocation, and secondly, that new needs arose with each fresh development.

According to the original plan every monastery was to have attached to it not less than seven, and not more than thirty canons.

The number of male candidates who sought admission to the Order was greater than the demand. Hence the Master was forced either to refuse subjects, or to find some further outlet for their activity and zeal.

Whatever his motive he early accepted work in which the nuns could take no active part, and before long he founded priories for canons only.

In the year 1148 Robert de Chesney succeeded Alexander, "The Magnificent," as Bishop of Lincoln. His election and consecration took place during Gilbert's absence at Citeaux. He was, says the historian, "a man of simplicity and great humility," and when Archdeacon of Leicester conducted himself in such a manner as to be "worthy of all praise." Henry of Huntingdon gives an account of his appointment in the following words: "All

deemed him worthy of so great an honour ; King, clergy, and people assented with great joy. He received the pontifical benediction from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and was received at Lincoln on the Epiphany with great rejoicing and affection by the people and clergy." However, in spite of his popularity, the new Bishop incurred the disapprobation of some critics by the favour he showed to the religious orders and canons regular.

✧ In the first year of his episcopate he founded, in a suburb of Lincoln, the Priory of St Catherine for the Gilbertine canons. The holy founder was his personal friend, and he was well acquainted with all the affairs of the Order. There was some laxity among the clergy of his own diocese, and it seems probable that the Bishop had in view the safeguarding of churches and the well-being of souls, when he appointed monks and canons regular to so many livings. He handed over to the guardianship of the canons of St Catherine's Priory the Hospital of the Holy Sepulchre, and all the possessions of "its poor and brothers." He endowed the priory with "the prebend of Canwick, the mother church of Newark, the houses on the north and east sides of it, two manors, and other lands in the same town, the church of Brace-

bridge, and the churches of Norton, Marton, and Newton, with all their appurtenances."

St Catherine's was the first Gilbertine foundation destined solely for canons. Women were admitted later, probably both nuns and sisters, but they had no place in the plan of the Bishop * of Lincoln. At the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII., mention is made of the Gilbertine sisters, who served the sick in the Hospital of the Holy Sepulchre. *

Four new monasteries were added to the Order in the reign of Stephen—the small Priory of Cattley, on an island in the marsh of Walcote, the gift of Peter de Belingey; the foundation of Sixhills, due to the generosity of the de Greslei * family; the Priory of North Ormesby, called also Nuns Ormesby, founded by Gilbert of Ormesby; the manors of Alvingham and Cockerington, the gift of the de Melsa family. It will be noticed that in each instance the priory and endowment was the gift of a nobleman or person of distinction. Usually these benefac- tions owed their origin either to the desire of a delinquent to make reparation for wrong-doing, or to the common custom of the times, which allowed the substitution of a grant of money or lands for a promise to join the Crusaders, or to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It

was also usual to build and endow churches and monasteries for personal well-being, or in memory of deceased friends and relations.

The ceremony performed when these grants of lands were made was "in keeping with a gift to God."

The Church of St Mary at Alvingham was given to the Order in the reign of Stephen. On the day when the gift was registered an interesting ceremony took place.

It was the time of the General Chapter, and many priors and prioresses were at Sempringham. The Bishop, Robert de Chesney, presided. A remarkable congregation filled the church. The service, a great religious pageant, was sacred and solemn. Against the dull-grey of the priory wall, a living picture stood out vivid and gorgeous. The costly apparel of noble patrons, lords and ladies, was in strong contrast to the gleaming white of the canons' copes.

Gilbert was present, a humble parish priest. He had long since renounced the privileges of his position as lord of the manor, and had not yet assumed the habit of religion.

At the other side of the partition wall, out of sight, yet within hearing, the nuns prayed and listened.

At a given signal, he who wished to confirm his gift went up to the high altar, laid the charter thereon, and, placing his hand on the holy table, swore to abide by his promise. The Church of Alvingham was given "to God and to the nuns." Bishop de Chesney solemnly invested them with "the Church and its appurtenances."

Gilbert's directing influence is apparent in the wording of this and other deeds of gift. He delighted in making known to the world that the brethren sought the welfare of the sisters before their own.

On the occasion of another General Chapter a similar gift was made. The religious assembled in the church. There was also present the donor, Robert de Pormor, accompanied by the Earl of Leicester, Countess Roese, two chaplains, and others. Robert offered lands in Alvingham and Cockerington to the Gilbertines. He went up to the high altar, and, placing his hand upon it, swore that "his gift should abide for ever." He made it into the "hand of Peter de Goufle," who was probably a canon of Sempringham. Notwithstanding the solemnity with which these grants were confirmed, the right of the religious to possess them was often questioned.

The list of gifts of lands and churches made to the Gilbertines is a long one, and shows how closely they were brought into touch with kings, princes, and nobles. The two great Yorkshire houses of Watton and Malton owed their origin to Eustace Fitzjohn, who was one of the chief peers of England in the reign of Henry I. At Malton, instead of the charge of nuns, the canons had three hospitals, "at which the poor might have lodging and daily refectio." These houses were all at some little distance from the priory. One was in Wheelgate, another at Broughton, about a mile to the west, a third, the gift of William de Flamville, on an island in the Derwent. Pain de Beauchamp and Roese, his wife, founded Chicksand Priory, in Bedfordshire, "for canons and nuns of the Order of Sempringham." The house of Newstead-on-Ancholme was the gift of Henry II., in the year 1171, made, he wrote, "for the safety of my soul and the soul of Queen Eleanor, of my heirs, and of all faithful kings who shall come after my days; and for the welfare of my kingdom, for the soul of King Henry, my grandfather, and of Geoffrey, my father, and of all my ancestors." Newstead was situated in the island of Rucholm, and another priory, that of Mattersey, was on an island in the River



ST MARY'S, OLD MALTON (INTERIOR)

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Idle, in Nottinghamshire. Many of the priories were originally in damp and unhealthy places. Around them grew up well-drained meadows and green pastures, bearing witness to the industry and agricultural genius of the Gilbertines. Although the number of benefactions made to the Order was considerable, yet upon examination it will be found that the lands granted were generally broad expanses of marshy ground which needed years of arduous labour before they could be rendered fit for cultivation, or suitable for building sites.

Of the thirteen priories of later date only two—Shouldham and Hitchin—were founded for both sexes. It is probable that the existing monasteries provided ample room for women who desired to enter the Order. St Gilbert, however, does not appear to have wished for a great increase of members, for the concluding articles of his rule enforce limitations on this point. Provision was made in the double monasteries for twice as many nuns as canons. We have no clue as to the founder's motives in limiting the number of subjects; it may have been a fear that if they became very numerous the revenues of the Order would be insufficient for their maintenance.

The foundation of Holland Brigge, made for

the canons of Sempringham, is worthy of mention on account of the curious regulations regarding it set forth by John Godwin, the founder. Holland Brigge was situated in the heart of the fens, a few miles from Sempringham. John Godwin was a rich citizen of Lincoln, and he willed that after the canons had provided for their own support, they should repair the highway of Holland Brigge and the thirty bridges upon it! We get in the terms of this donation a glimpse of motives other than spiritual which directed the Lincoln citizen in the making of his gift. The impartial historical critic cannot fail to see in transactions such as this the astuteness of the donor, who received considerably more than he gave.

The Gilbertines did a great deal towards reclaiming and cultivating the desolate fen country. "The fens seem to have been the territory of the Order of Sempringham as mountains were of Benedictines, and valleys of Cistercians."

The Priory of Bullington is of special interest, as it was there that Gilbert took the habit of his Order. It was founded in the reign of Stephen.

The history of the foundation may be given in the words of the chronicler: "To all the faithful of Christ," wrote Simon Fitz-William, "greeting. Know that I have founded a house of

religion in my park of Bullington, in honour of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I have granted it to the nuns of the Order of Sempringham, and their brothers, clerk and lay, serving God there. . . . I have also given them a part of my park that they may dwell there, and a part of my wood and of my lands; and for their support, the churches of Bullington and Langton." The endowment also included Hackthorn Mill, certain pastures, and lands on which they might build granges. Philip de Kyme, son of the founder, also made benefactions to the priory; he gave lands for the support of seven canons, and promised twenty pints of salt a year, a gift of no mean value in those days. Philip and his wife Hahenwisa also made grants for the clothing of the religious, and for the pharmacy or medicine and drug-store of the nuns, that of the canons was supported from lands in Boston, given by the Prior of Sempringham, "out of pity for their voluntary poverty." In acknowledgment of and gratitude for other grants of lands the nuns of Bullington promised to keep burning in their church "for ever" two lights, one of which was to be placed near the tombs of the founders. At a later date Alexander de Crevecœur added to Bullington the island of Tunstall, near Redburn, on which

his father had founded a Gilbertine priory, in the reign of Stephen.

The Order spread with great rapidity. The humble stock, on which Gilbert had grafted one branch after another, grew, whilst the founder was still in his prime, into a great and noble tree.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MASTER OF SEMPRINGHAM

THE title of Master which Gilbert chose to designate the Head or Superior-General of his Order does not appear to have been used previously by any other purely monastic body.

Regulations for elections to this office were set down with great precision in the rule. The brethren were bidden to seek amongst their number for "one of devout religion, disciplined character, and discreet wisdom, rather than deep learning and noble birth. If he be not a man of pleasant speech, a diligent follower of the institutions of the Order, and a lover of virtue, he shall not be admitted, but rejected by all."

When the Master died a special chapter was held to which were summoned the prior and prioress of each house, and certain other canons and nuns. These assembled at Sempringham, where the Master's body was brought if he had chanced to die elsewhere. "When all were assembled the Prior of Sempringham delivered

the body of the dead Master for burial with due solemnity. Immediately afterwards they proceeded to the election of another Master.

The form used in electing a Master is graphically described in the following terms : “ First, all shall choose four men, having the fear of the Lord before their eyes, and zealous for the Order. They shall swear on the Scriptures that they will take to themselves nine men, namely, five priors and four canons, conspicuous for honourable lives and unspotted reputations. The four electors shall tell the names of the nine before all, so that if the greater and wiser part wish to refuse anyone, he shall be taken out from the number of the chosen. And when they have consented, all the priors and canons shall go into the chapter of the nuns, and the form of electing the Master shall be explained to them, that they may give their consent. Afterwards all those thirteen shall swear that they will choose him whom they think best fitted to rule the Order, not mindful of friendship, hatred, intimacy, favour, regard, and whatever can pervert the judgment of man. They shall go apart to speak concerning their hard task. The rest of the canons shall celebrate the Mass of the Holy Ghost, while the brothers, nuns, and sisters remain at prayer. Then all shall return to the chapter of the nuns, and

promise once more that they will hold the election valid. One of the thirteen shall declare whom they have chosen, saying, 'Behold, in the fear of the Lord, we have chosen this man as Master.' With singing of 'Te Deum' he shall be led to the altar, and thence to the chapter of the nuns, in which the institutions touching the Master, his way of life, and his governance, shall be read distinctly and openly in the hearing of all. He shall swear that he will keep all the liberties and institutions of the Order. . . . And that he will cause those under him to observe them by precept and by example. Immediately all shall owe him the wonted obedience."

The authority of the Master lasted only so long as he had health of body and vigour of mind to enable him to fulfil the duties of the office. He might be deposed either for wrong-doing, or in consequence of sickness, old age, or infirmity. In the first case he was to be warned and only put down when a third admonition had been disregarded.

Gilbert was eminently fitted to be a religious ruler. He was distinguished by all those qualities which he had himself specified as essential in a Master of Sempringham. He possessed the true paternal spirit, a mingling of the virtues of charity and fortitude. To this was

added a most tender reverence for virtue and innocence, with a boundless trust in God.

For many years the founder's life was a continuous journey. The priories increased rapidly in number, and henceforth the obligation of visiting them kept the Master on horseback for many hours each week.

He travelled with two canons and a lay-brother. The Gilbertine monasteries were not actually far apart, yet they were so inconveniently situated, amidst fens and marshes, that the business of reaching them was no easy task. Roads of all sorts—waterways, bridle-paths, and beaten tracks—were bad, and small protection was available in inclement weather, or on occasions of incidental mischance.

Although they were obliged from motives of expediency to use strong and serviceable horses, yet all appearance of prosperity and position was eschewed. Gay and handsome trappings, so much in vogue at the time, were strictly prohibited. The riding apparel of the brothers was simple and unassuming. The Master always wore the same old cape of dull-grey material; time and weather worked their will upon it, yet Gilbert never changed it for a better.

The most devoted of his chaplains, and the one who usually accompanied him was named

Albinus. He was sincerely attached to the holy founder, who in return entertained for him a warm affection, and, later, relied upon him for aid in sickness and infirmity.

Whilst upon the road the little party occupied themselves with holy thoughts and pious practices. Sometimes they chanted psalms, sometimes prayed aloud, and always avoided "idle chatter" or frivolous demeanour. Gilbert considered the bestowal of alms to be a duty, hence no beggar was passed unaided.

When safely arrived at their destination, the travellers immediately conformed to the common life. The Master was a model of monastic regularity. If not prevented by work peculiar to his office, he attended all the religious functions.

During the hours allotted to study or to reading, he would sit with the brethren in the cloister or discuss theological difficulties with the students. Presently, as they still thought with admiration of his learning, they would see him occupied with the brother carpenter in mending the furniture, or helping the masons in the erection or repairing of priory buildings.

The Gilbertine houses were generally double monasteries, and although the founder was separated from the nuns by the usual rules of the enclosure, yet he had them constantly in mind.

He did not fail to remind the brethren of the primary end of their vocation, nor did he let them forget that they existed as a religious body for the sake of the nuns.

Amongst reformers of all ages there has ever been a tendency to look backwards to a real or imaginary golden age, and from the vision to gain wisdom to combat present evil, or to form schemes for renovation and reconstruction. Probably Gilbert had been similarly actuated when he resolved to form a band of men whose lives should be in bold contrast to the gross selfishness of the times.

The Anglo-Normans were not, as a class, remarkable for the disinterestedness of their ambitions, or for the gallantry of their arms, and the knight of Gilbert's day was "often a needy adventurer who roamed about the country pillaging his neighbours, and looking about for a fief." He was, "generally speaking . . . a very suspicious character."

How great the contrast between such a one and he who, in the days of yore, held the badge of knighthood to be the pledge of virtue and of courage! Gilbert determined to train his sons to an ideal of Christian and religious chivalry. He would strive to stop decay, by a return to the simplicity of truth.

The example of the Master was a constant lesson in virtue to his sons. He spared neither time nor trouble in good works, least of all in the service of the spouses of Jesus Christ. Should a question arise of profit or gain to the priory, their portion was the largest; should a loss befall, the nuns must suffer least.

With spiritual help he was still more generous. The strictness of enclosure cut them off from all religious aids, save such as the brothers rendered, Gilbert always kept this in view, and whenever occasion offered he gave of his best. The devotion and fervour with which he celebrated the Divine Mysteries made the days of his coming festivals of consolation. His words of wise direction, and of burning exhortation, were treasured by his daughters as pearls of great price.

Like all great saints, Gilbert practised severe bodily austerities. His abstemiousness in the matter of food dated from the days of his sojourn in the Bishop's palace, but it increased as time went on. He generally took his meals standing or kneeling; only on rare occasions did he sit down. The better part of his food he gave to the poor; for this purpose he kept a plate close at hand to which he transferred much of his meal.

He never allowed himself the midday rest, although he secured it by rule to other members

of his Order. Besides taking part in the Night Office he usually continued in prayer until the day broke. When, at length, he sought rest, he devised for himself further means whereby he might mortify the flesh. His bed was prepared like those of the brethren, but he rarely lay upon it. The short repose which he allowed his weary body was taken in a sitting posture. Whilst composing himself to rest he continued his prayer. Presently his chin would fall upon his breast, and he would sleep for a space. Then awakening, he would betake himself to prayer again, and so on during the time allotted to repose.

It was said of Gilbert, that he worked few miracles while living, yet there were not wanting in his life incidents of a miraculous and supernatural character.

Albinus plays a prominent part in two of the anecdotes recorded. It was this good brother who supplied St Gilbert's biographer with much of the matter set down in his chronicle.

On one occasion St Gilbert was seized with "an ague," which perhaps might, in modern phraseology, be interpreted as "a chill." Albinus evidently thought that his holy father imagined himself to be worse than he really was. With the familiarity of a son, he advised him "to shake it off." Gilbert listened patiently, and

then, with a smile, asked Albinus if he would suffer the illness for him.

The chaplain readily consented, thinking it a small matter. The next day he was laid low with a bad attack of fever. The lesson he learnt was long remembered, and henceforth he refrained from judging hastily of his holy father's state of health or powers of endurance.

In the second story the positions are reversed. Albinus was ill and quite unable to accompany the Master on his journey. Gilbert was accordingly obliged to leave without him, but waited for him at Newstead, where he bade him follow.

Gilbert waited in vain. Weary of the delay, and anxious to proceed on his way he sent Albinus a message, bidding him have no more fever, but to come at once to join him at Newstead. When the message reached the priory, Albinus was in bed worn out and exhausted by an attack of high fever. The malady from which he was suffering is not stated, but regularly each day, at the same hour, the fever returned, and left the patient worn out and weak.

On the day following the coming of the message, Albinus lay, as it were, in wait for the arrival of an unwelcome visitor, very much as a householder might await the coming of an expected thief. At the usual time there was

the expected rise of temperature; immediately Albinus spoke, as though addressing a visible assailant. "Why dost thou assault me?" he said. "Hath not the Master forbidden thee to approach me again? In the name of the Lord, and in obedience to the Master, I forbid thee to dare to harass me further." He then made the sign of the cross and fell into a refreshing sleep. Upon awakening he found himself completely cured, and set out at once for the place of meeting. The chronicler remarks, in conclusion, that from that day forward Albinus was no more troubled with fever.

Another story is told by Roger, Prior of Malton. He was Gilbert's intimate friend and confidant. Sometimes he accompanied him upon his visitation journeys, especially when the founder was visiting the Yorkshire houses, or those in the north of Lincolnshire.

Once when they were travelling homewards from Malton or Watton, the weather was wild and stormy. When the travellers came to the Humber, it was found impossible to cross to the other side, for the wind was blowing a gale from the south. No boat could cross the water in the face of the storm. Gilbert and the brethren turned aside and sought shelter at Hessleskew Grange, which stood near the shore. The Master

chafed at the delay, for there was business of importance awaiting him. In times of trouble and perplexity his trust was ever in God. He turned to Him now, asking for help, bidding his companions recite the "Our Father."

Then, as there appeared no signs of improvement in the weather, he determined to trust his safety to Heaven and to push on. Accordingly, he ordered the horses to be brought and with his followers set off towards the sea, the storm still raging with unabated fury. As they reached the shore the wind suddenly fell, and the water became smooth and calm. A boat was at hand, and the sailors, who had great reverence for the virtue and sanctity of Gilbert, agreed to row the party across the Humber.

They put out to sea and as they left the land a fair north wind sprang up, filled the sails, and bore them quickly and safely to the farther shore; but no sooner were they in safety than the storm renewed its fury, and raged with all its former violence.

The Master of Sempringham was well known to the folk of eastern England. Rich and poor alike revered and loved him. The two following anecdotes illustrate the esteem in which he was held, and the power of holiness attributed to him by persons of widely different social standing.

A cup or goblet from which the saint usually drank was sent to a skilled artisan to be repaired. The good man was very ill when the vessel was brought to him, yet he rejoiced exceedingly when he heard whence it came, and to whose use it had been devoted. With great faith in the merits of the saint and his power with God he drank from the cup and was immediately restored to perfect health.

The second incident is of another sort, and is more interesting as it brings us into actual contact with St Gilbert.

A noble lady, the wife of "Simon de Bello Campo," had a great esteem for the Master of Sempringham, and believed him to be a saint. One day she determined to visit him intending to beg his blessing, and at the same time procure some gift which she could keep as a remembrance, and probably treasure as a relic. The saint gave her a loaf of bread!

History does not tell of the feelings of the petitioner when presented with so unexpected a donation. It was, no doubt, the dole bestowed on beggars. The quiet humour and ready wit with which Gilbert parried the attack on his humility throws a light upon a pleasing and very human side of his character.

The great lady, notwithstanding her surprise

and rebuff, carried the loaf home and carefully kept it. She was convinced of the sanctity of the donor.

Later she gave morsels from it to persons suffering from infirmity or afflicted by disease. In each case a cure was effected. The rest of the loaf remained fresh and incorrupt. It was still in that state when the miracle was put on record, many years afterwards.

The chronicler concludes his account of this incident with a short dissertation on the humility of the saint. He says that the Master always shunned the applause and esteem of men, that he ever strove to avoid "the glory of miracles," and that when devout people flocked to him seeking his blessing and favours, spiritual and temporal, through his intercession, he only yielded to their solicitations after much hesitation and under great constraint. He considered himself unworthy of all honour.

The fervent spirit of piety and love of God which Gilbert enkindled in the hearts of his children was the most wonderful of his works.

The events and circumstances attending the actual foundation of the Order have been faithfully chronicled, but details as to the labours and sufferings which completed the work, and kept the walls of the spiritual edifice standing, are

wanting. Incidentally we learn that the peace of the Order was disturbed by disputes as to property, and it is on record that Gilbert was more than once cited to appear in court to make good his claims. Particulars of one only of these law-suits have been preserved.

The Church of Alvingham was made over, as has been said previously, with solemn rite to the Gilbertines. Before many years had elapsed their right to it was disputed. A certain "Master Stephen" refused to acknowledge the right of the Prior of Alvingham to the Church of Kedington. The dispute was referred to Rome and the Pope charged the Abbot Hugh of Bury St Edmunds with the hearing and settlement of the case.

Jocelin of Brakelond, a monk of Bury St Edmunds, gives, in his famous chronicle, a description of this his first Superior. Jocelin entered the monastery in 1173 when Hugh was Abbot. Writing many years afterwards, he says of him: "In those days Abbot Hugh grew old and his eyes were dim. He was a good and kindly man, but in temporal matters he was unskilful and improvident. He relied too much on his own intimates and believed too readily in them, rather trusting to strangers' advice than using his own judgment."

S. ADELWOLD'S, ALVINGHAM AND S. MARY'S, NORTH COCKERINGTON



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In this case we may hope that the Abbot's judgment, or that of his advisers, was correct, for the Gilbertines won the case, and "Master Stephen made a formal renunciation in the Chapter of Lincoln."

When ecclesiastical cases were tried in the King's Court, it sometimes became imperative that the client should appeal directly to the sovereign. This course was followed by Gilbert in at least one instance. The King was in Normandy, and there the Master determined to seek him. He set off accompanied by his usual retinue of two priests and a lay-brother. They found Henry occupied with military and state affairs. The humble appearance of the Gilbertine envoys did not impress the courtiers with a sense of their importance; however, the Master's quiet insistence of manner and dignity of bearing told in their favour more efficaciously than show of wealth or proof of power could have done.

King Henry received Gilbert kindly, listened to his case, and granted him the petition he had come to ask. And he did more, for he treated him with marked esteem, and sent him back to England with authority to establish and secure his claim.

Gilbert did not, however, always meet with

such courteous treatment. Frequently he was reviled, and often personally insulted. Sometimes he came into collision with persons of rank and influence, and then he had to bear the brunt of their displeasure. Once, like his Divine Master, he suffered blows in the good cause, but this he bore joyfully, remembering the Divine example. The aggressor, some angry partisan, saw in the holy founder an appropriator of his family goods. It was an age when rank counted for much, and brute force for more, else had the retaliation, which the brethren of Sempringham dealt the offender, rung its defiance down the ages of history. Gilbert gloried in humiliation, for it rendered him more like his Lord.

It sometimes happened that difficulties arose between the Gilbertines and the Cistercians. The cause of discord was usually connected with the rights and privileges appertaining to the possession of land, pasturage of cattle, and the like.

The most noteworthy instances of trouble were in connection with Alvingham which was close to Louth Park, and Bullington, which adjoined Kyme.

Gilbert had always maintained the most friendly relations with the Cistercians. When friction occurred he was ever ready to restore

concord with tactful suggestions and words of peace.

In or about the year 1164 Gilbert considered it advisable to take more decided measures to remedy present grievances, and to guard against future evils. He asked St Aelred of Rievaulx to meet him with certain monks and priors, so that together they might discuss their respective rights.

Aelred and Gilbert were old friends. The former had in 1143 been Abbot of Revesby, a monastery in the fen country, a district which was regarded as peculiarly the home of the Gilbertines.

The saints met. They had much in common for both were men of peace, and both were of gentle breeding. They drew up a solemn agreement to safeguard the rights of their Orders.

The document, which is dated 1164, opens with the words: "In the name of the Holy and Indivisible Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," and has for its object the "keeping of peace and charity." The regulations laid down were precise and clear and had reference to the holding of land, the erection of buildings, the pasturage of animals, and other points of mutual interest. One clause enacted: "No one of either chapter might build a grange or sheepfold

within two leagues of a grange or sheepfold of the other Order," and there were other clauses of a similar nature.

The agreement was signed by seven Cistercian abbots, including Aelred of Rievaulx, by Gilbert of Sempringham, and seven priors.

In the year 1174 a further agreement was drawn up, this time between the Abbot of Louth Park and the Prior of Alvingham. From it we get some idea of the scattered possessions of both Orders, for we read that "the pact" was to be kept in twenty parishes of Lincolnshire.

The rule of Sempringham provided for all emergencies. Gilbert sought to make his fold secure at every point. He obtained the protection of the Holy See, and fought the secular powers to obtain maintenance of privileges and security of gifts. He taught his sons to hold their rights with courtesy and humility, and yet never to yield when justice called upon them to stand firm. The Master's personal sanctity as well as his eminent administrative abilities enabled the Order to ride safely over many rough places. When a less powerful hand held the reins, "the chariot" suffered many disasters either from deterioration in structure or from want of discernment in the guide.

CHAPTER IX

PERILS AND PRIVILEGES

THE life of St Gilbert was so intimately connected with the growth of his Order that the history of one must necessarily be the story of the other. In the same way as the personality of a great builder appears to be lost in or overshadowed by the grandeur of his edifice, so the figure of a religious founder is apt to seem obscured by the growth and increase of the spiritual family to which he has given birth. Yet in neither case is that which appears to be true really so. The individuality of the architect or builder lives and breathes in stately column and in lofty arch, in sculptured pillar, and in carven saint. Thus also is it with the founder. His great soul is the inspiration of his Order; it influences all that it touches; it lives on long after the poor human body has crumbled into dust.

The Order of Sempringham was built up like a great spiritual edifice by St Gilbert. The task

of building cost him years of anxious labour, years in which he had to meet and overcome difficulties of every description. Perils threatened the Order on every side, from the ill-will of its enemies, and from the indiscreet adherence of its friends.

We have seen how benefactions, including grants of lands and churches, were almost thrust upon the Order, and how these gifts were made to God "for ever." Gilbert rightly considered that he was the custodian of grants so made, and when, as not unfrequently happened, the hand of greed and avarice was stretched forth to snatch the gift even from the very altar on which it was offered, then stepped forth the intrepid champion ready to defend the rights of God and His Holy Church at the peril of his life.

The early English law relating to Church property was definite and clear, as the following extract from a reliable source will prove. "In the Anglo-Saxon land-books, this notion that God and His saints are the true owners of what we call 'Church lands' is put before us in many striking phrases. In the oldest of them the newly converted Ethelbert says, 'To thee, St Andrew, and to thy church at Rochester, where Justus the Bishop presides, do I give a portion of my land.' . . . There are human beings who are

directing the affairs of the Saint and the Church, receiving, distributing, and enjoying the produce of the land. 'They are the Saint's administrators.'" It was this position of guardian or administrator of God and the saints which called into action the spirit of the warrior so remarkable in many of our English saints. The names of St Anselm, St Thomas of Canterbury, and St Hugh of Lincoln stand out boldly as defenders of the Church. The fiery Norman zeal which was such a noticeable characteristic of the two latter had no part in Gilbert's composition. He possessed the dogged determination of the Saxon, was calm but unswerving in action, and roused himself to impetuosity and passion only as need arose.

Perhaps he inherited the refinement of his chivalrous disposition from his Norman ancestors, or perhaps there had come to him, through his remote Saxon forbears, a strain of the old Teutonic reverence for things high and holy—and of this was born delicacy of thought and feeling.

However this may be, Gilbert was by nature a lover of peace. He avoided all contention, and never engaged in law-suits or in strife unless the needs of his Order or the glory of God required that he should do so.

It was a common custom in the Middle Ages

for nobles and other persons of distinction to make over to religious bodies certain portions of their land in exchange for the responsibility of their debts, which the religious accepted and in due course paid, or did not pay, according to their means and circumstances. Gilbert warned his canons against transactions of this sort, and wrote: "They who in very truth long to serve God shall beware of taking lands and pastures for a year's payment from secular men." In even more emphatic words he further decreed, "Nor indeed is it lawful to become a pledge for any secular, for it befits us who study to please God, not the world, to be strangers to the causes and business of those who rejoice in the service of the world, not of God. We forbid the priors and others in authority in our Order to entangle themselves by exchange or pledge in the debts of any man."

A danger which threatened to destroy the spirit of the Gilbertine Order, as indeed of many another, was the freedom which regulated the laws of hospitality. Inns were few and the entertainment they were able to provide was poor in quality and expensive in cost. Hence travellers of every condition flocked to the monasteries, where hospitality was offered freely to rich and poor alike. This constant influx of worldly

persons was most detrimental to religious peace and seclusion, so much so indeed that special rules had to be drawn up to maintain the vigour of the religious spirit.

Another source of trouble was the importunity of benefactors, and the interference which they often considered themselves at liberty to exercise with regard to the affairs of the Order.

The conditions of life in St Gilbert's time were such that every householder, secular or monastic, was constantly threatened by dangers which in our day have either ceased to exist or have been minimised by science and organised industry. In the rule of Sempringham special provision is made for any monastery which suffers loss by flood. The dwellers in the fen country were constantly threatened by this grave peril of water, and the Gilbertine houses were especially exposed as many of them were "in solitary islands formed by rivers, and among the reeds and willows of the marshy grounds." Historians have given graphic descriptions of the disasters caused by the inroads of the sea. William of Newburgh says : "In 1175 the ocean, as though irritated by the sins of men, raged more than was its wont, broke through the barriers which had been formerly prepared against the stormy inburst of the waves in Hoiland, and rushed violently over the flat

country. It destroyed almost all cattle and a multitude of men; the rest barely escaped by climbing up trees and on the roofs of houses. The ocean returned unto itself after two days, as though its fury was satisfied." Gilbert wrote referring to these floods: "Since often by chance many misfortunes, greater and less, worthy of correction, happen in our houses, if it is necessary to do or to give anything for the repairing of house, enclosures, walls, or ditches . . . it shall be done."

Fire was another peril common at the time. Wood was used in building dwelling-houses, while straw, dried leaves, and hay were plentifully employed for domestic purposes. Such materials provided ample food for the flames.

A fire broke out at Sempringham in the founder's lifetime, which did great damage. The account of the disaster, written by one of the canons long after its occurrence, is strong in condemnation of the nun who caused it. Upon the mind of the casual reader, however, who views the event from a distant standpoint, the conviction is forced that circumstances other than those narrated would, if known, explain away a carelessness which is wholly incredible.

"A nun bearing a light through the kitchen by night, fixed a part of a burnt candle to another

she was going to burn, so that both were alight at once. But when the part fixed on to the other was almost consumed, it fell on the floor on which much straw was collected ready for a fire. The nun did not heed it, and believing that the fire would go out by itself, she went away and shut the door. But the flame, finding food, first devoured the straw lying close by, then the whole house with the adjacent offices and their contents. Whence a great loss happened to the Church."

The minuteness of this account is a little astonishing, and perhaps the acrimony in the tone is due to masculine impatience with feminine foolishness. The statement that the nun thought that the fire would go out of itself, the details about the straw, and then the addition "she went away and shut the door," are all very suggestive. However, the damage done was great enough to warrant this and greater condemnation. The church at Watton was destroyed by fire in 1167, and other misfortunes of a like nature befell the Order in later years.

The list of privileges granted to the Gilbertines is imposing. It cannot, however, be balanced against the perils, for it is evident that the gravest of dangers grew from the privileges. The Order was put under the protection of the Pope soon after the approval of the rule. That this

was no empty compliment is evidenced by the many favours and exemptions granted by succeeding popes. In the year 1178 Pope Alexander III. issued a decree in favour of Roger, Prior of Malton. It is probable that each of the houses received a similar bull. "It is addressed to Roger, Prior of the Blessed Mary of Malton, and to the other brothers, canons, and lay-brothers, present and future, professed to live the regular life according to the Institutes of the Order of Sempringham." The Pope confirms the possessions, "which they hold justly and canonically, now or in the future, by the concession of pontiffs, by the generosity of kings and princes, by the offering of the faithful, or in other just ways with the favour of God." He decreed further that it would be "unlawful for any man to disturb the said church (of the Blessed Mary at Malton), to take away its possessions, to hold them, to diminish them, or to harass them by any vexations." A solemn warning concludes the bull: "If, therefore, in the future, anyone, ecclesiastic or secular, shall knowingly strive to go against this charter, which we have drawn up, he shall be admonished twice or thrice, unless he shall correct his fault, so far as he can, with worthy satisfaction; he shall lack the dignity of honour, and shall know that he is accused before the

Divine Judge of the iniquity which he has worked, and shall be shut out from the most sacred Body and Blood of God and of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and shall lie under the extreme judgment of Divine vengeance." This bull shows that the Pope held the Order in high esteem and was no doubt issued in answer to some appeal from Gilbert, who was anxious to secure the welfare of his sons before he was forced to leave them. At the time it was published he was about ninety years of age.

The Gilbertines were also favoured with royal patronage. Early in his reign Henry II. took all the houses of the Order under his protection, and decreed that they should hold all their property "well and in peace, freely and quietly, wholly and fully and honourably, in wood and field, in meadow and pastures, in water and marshes, in tofts and crofts, in roads and ways, and in all places within boroughs and without." He further granted that "justiciars, sheriffs, and other servants should protect the property of the Order with as much care and diligence as they would that of the King himself." And again we read that: "In city, in borough, in markets and fairs, in crossing of bridges and at harbours of the sea, and in all places throughout England and Normandy," the Gilbertines and

“their men” were free of all tolls and taxes. In addition to these favours they were allowed the privilege of holding courts on their manors for the trial of cases concerning their own tenants, “free and villein,” in which they had power to impose and inflict severe penalties. They were also free from obligations to attend the sheriff’s court, and could only be summoned to plead at the King’s court, or before his chief justices.

The forest laws to which allusion has already been made, “were drawn up,” according to the testimony of contemporary writers, “rather to ensure the peace of the beasts than of the King’s subjects.” Mutilation or death was the penalty appointed for the breaking of the law. From the forest laws generally ecclesiastics were not exempt, but the charter of Henry II. granted to the Gilbertines the privileges that they and their men should be “quit in the forest.” This exemption was of great value, as the Order possessed land in several counties and held “rights” in divers forests. It made them independent of the action of the grand forester, a person of much influence and importance. Lingard describes the forest tribunals graphically in very few words. “The royal forests,” he writes, “had their own offices and magistrates ;

they were governed by a peculiar code of laws, and their immunities were jealously maintained in the court of the chief forester, a bloody tribunal where the slightest offence was punished by the loss of eyes or members."

Under Henry II. some of these laws were modified, fines and imprisonment being substituted for the extreme penalties. Yet even in his reign the evils were grave enough to evoke strong protests, and calls for redress from philanthropists, both lay and ecclesiastic. The poor farmers were debarred from cultivating their fields, in order that the wild beast might have more space over which to roam; the herdsmen were robbed of their pastures for sheep and cattle that the King might have finer sport; and even "the bees themselves were scarcely allowed their natural liberty." The object of this last strange persecution seems to have been to force the bees to take refuge in the forests, where they would become the property of the King.

Another burden from which the Gilbertines were released was that of "castle-guard," a burden which weighed heavily on many of the monasteries. This tax obliged the religious to provide, according to regulation, protection for the royal castles.

"The knights of the Benedictines of the Abbey

of Abingdon were bound to guard the King's castle of Windsor, the knights of the Abbey of Peterborough the castle of Rockingham, the knights of the Abbey of St Edmunds his castle of Norwich. The forty or fifty knights of St Edmunds were divided into four or five troops, each of which had to guard Norwich Castle for three months of the year." This meant that the money for maintenance and service of the knights had to be supplied by the respective monasteries. In addition to the actual guarding of the castles the monasteries became liable for the cost of keeping them in repair, as is evident from a charter of exemption granted to the Gilbertines. They were declared free "from works at castles, bridges, parks, ramparts, and dykes, and from supplying wood from their chases for building purposes."

Other privileges and exemptions were granted to them, some in the founder's lifetime, more in succeeding years. Gilbert was fully aware of the dangers attending the acceptance of favours and of gifts, and, doubtless, would have dispensed with the former and refused the latter had he felt justified in doing so. Religious poverty, which he valued so highly, forbade the refusal of alms, and yet the alms themselves were apt to prove a snare to the keeping of that poverty in all its

integrity. His biographer says of the Master in this connection : “ The man of God received all these things with fear and trembling, and some compulsion; many he refused and utterly despised, for he ever loved honourable poverty.”

CHAPTER X

THE RELIGIOUS OF SEMPRINGHAM

SUCCESSFUL as Gilbert was in defending the rights and privileges of his Order, it was yet as spiritual guide and champion that he most excelled. For many years he lived the religious life without being bound by religious vows; during that time he united in his own person the virtues and characteristics peculiar to each branch of the congregation.

He considered learning, both sacred and secular, as indispensable to the canons of Sempringham, and he was himself a scholar of no mean ability; the contemplative vocation to which the nuns were called, he had made his own for many years, and the duty of service which was the mission of the lay-brothers had been his self-imposed task since the foundation of the Order.

Gilbert had taught his first religious daughters how to make mental prayer. They were apt pupils, and transmitted his teaching to later

members. Many amongst them reached heights of sublime contemplation, and were favoured by our Lord with extraordinary graces.

St Aelred, in speaking of the Gilbertine nuns, gives testimony to their holiness. He tells in particular of one whose soul "in a manner bidding adieu to all worldly burdens, would be rapt above itself; it would be caught up by a strange, ineffable, and incomprehensible light, so that it saw nothing else but that which is, and which is the being of all." He describes these raptures or ecstasies in detail, and says that later other nuns were favoured in a like manner.

There was in the same community "a nun of consummate sense," who did not altogether approve of the spiritual state of her sisters. She expressed her incredulity, and was censorious in her judgment.

As time went on, and her sisters continued to receive extraordinary favours from their Divine Spouse, she began to desire a participation in the favours given, and asked the prioress how it was that she alone received no share in them.

She was told that the obstacle to grace was her want of virtue, and that as she did not believe in the truth of the visions vouchsafed, "nor love in others the virtues which she had not herself

received, they were denied her." The prioress further told her that she might hope to obtain a participation in the joys she coveted if she determined to give herself wholly and entirely to her Divine Spouse; she must, however, "renounce all things of the world, and affection for every mortal, and employ herself in thinking about God alone." After much fervent prayer, the longed-for favour was granted.

On the Day of Pentecost, when she was in church, she was rapt in ecstasy. To quote St Aelred again, "The light of which we have spoken was shed upon her, so that she was wafted up into it in an unspeakable manner, and was raised on high." Then feeling that "the inaccessible light which was beaming on her was more than her weak vision could endure, she prayed that her soul should be recalled . . . to the contemplation of the passion of our Lord."

Her prayer was granted, and she saw in vision our Saviour hanging upon the cross, pierced and bleeding. He cast upon her a most tender and loving glance. The good nun expressed her sorrow for misdoubting her sisters, and "declared herself unworthy" of the light she had received.

Mystic heights of contemplation such as these were not reached without the founder's wise

counsel and prudent direction. He knew the perils of the way—the darkness in the valley, the pitfalls of the mountains, the illusions of the hill-tops.

As a spiritual warrior Gilbert met and fought “the dragon and his angels” who in many forms lurked in ambush along the pilgrim’s path. Ever upwards he directed the footsteps of the spouses of Christ, and ever onwards he moved beside them, now checking the assaults of the demons of vice, now laying bare the stratagems of the sirens of temptation.

Of the blows he received in the conflict, he took no heed. The suffering was his own, the glory for his King.

Regular observance in all the priories was ensured by the constitutions which provided safeguards for every state and every occasion. When the members became numerous it was found advisable to guard against disunion between the “lettered” and the “unlettered” nuns by the prohibition of the use of Latin as a medium of common speech.

The yearly chapter was a constant means of strength, and also of promoting concord amongst the members. The superiors, both men and women, of all the houses, were obliged to attend it. They were bidden to discuss diligently the

manner in which the rule was observed, and the keeping of unbroken peace among themselves, "that their way of life may not easily grow cold, but continue through the long space of many years. . . . And because evil communications and useless speech bring forth no good fruit, but are contrary to religion and the safety of souls, we desire to avoid this vice. We will, therefore, follow in the footsteps of the Cistercian chapter, in which the graingers are not admitted, but are utterly excluded." The insertion of this clause points to trouble in connection with the lay-brothers, at a very early stage of the existence of the Order. Their daily life was passed in the open fields or markets where communication with secular persons was easy, and in some cases necessary. Probably personal experience of the evil consequences arising from the lay-brothers' love of talk, as well as the Cistercian example, led Gilbert to deny them access to the General Chapter.

Very minute and exhaustive regulations were set down for the journey to and from the chapter. The nuns were not to ride on horse-back, but were to drive in a covered cart so that they might be "seen of no one." The prior was warned to use prudence in the choice of brothers to accompany and attend to the wants of

the nuns upon the way; they were to consider their comfort and "help them diligently and reverently in all their needs." The food to be taken was also subject to regulation, and the religious were forbidden to lodge at any houses save those of their own Order. An interesting proof of the ceremony and importance attending these visits to the chapter is furnished by the document which affirms that "Philip de Kyme granted to the Bullington Priory the right of fishing in Dogdyke Water with four men, two boats, and two nets, when the nuns of Sempringham went to the General Chapter and returned from it." According to another chronicler "Countess Alice, daughter of Gilbert de Gant, granted land in Heckington, a few miles from Sempringham, at which the nuns might have a hostel when they came to the General Chapter."

The chapter was held at Sempringham, and all the members of the Order there at the time, canons, brothers, nuns, and sisters, gathered together to listen to the discourse of the Master. When this was finished, those not officially summoned were dismissed, and the assembly proceeded to discuss matters connected with the interests and well-being of the Order. The meeting was held on the Rogation days; at the

end "all received absolution together before setting out on the homeward journey," which probably meant that a special indulgence and blessing was granted to those who had attended the chapter.

As Gilbert advanced in years, he found the labour of making the visitations beyond his strength; upon his representation of this, the chapter granted to the Master of the Order the power of appointing annually, with their advice, two canons and a lay-brother, either to help with the work or to undertake it altogether. At the same time it was arranged that the visitation of the nuns might be undertaken by two of their own number. Again detailed rules governed the coming and going. These visitors were called "Scrutators" and "Scrutatrices." The latter visited the monasteries of women once or twice a year; they were attended by a canon and a lay-brother, but were not allowed to converse with them except in cases of urgent necessity, such as "death, fire, or theft." Except in the two instances mentioned, and when going to a new foundation, the nuns were not allowed to leave the enclosure.

The Divine Office was chanted daily, but singing was prohibited, "for we will," the rule declared, "that like the Blessed Virgin they

shall say the psalms in monotone, in the spirit of humility, rather than pervert the minds of the weak like the daughter of Herodias."

The library of the priory was in the keeping of the nuns, and in the special charge of the precentrix, whose work corresponded with that of the precentor in the Benedictine monasteries. This office is described by Abbot Gasquet in the following terms: "The cantor or precentor was one of the most important officials in the monastery . . . for the cantor was both singer, chief librarian, and archivist. Under his management all the Church services were arranged and performed. . . . He was also librarian, or armarius, the two offices, somewhat strangely perhaps to our modern notions, always going together. In this capacity he had charge of all the books contained in the aumbry or book-cupboard, or later in the book-room or library. Moreover, he had to prepare the ink for the various writers of manuscripts and charities, etc., and to prepare the necessary parchments for bookmaking. He had to watch that the books did not suffer from ill-use or misuse, and to see to the mending and binding of them all." The precentrix in the Order of Sempringham fulfilled offices very similar to the foregoing, although the nuns did not labour at copying

manuscripts and writing as did the canons. They sat in the cloister to read or sew, and when there were usually placed "the face of one to the back of the other, unless two were sewing at the same garment."

There was some distinction allowed between the lay-sisters and those who, although disqualified to rank with the "lettered" nuns, were yet in a position above the former. This is clear from the regulations laid down for the reception of postulants or aspirants to the religious life. No girls were admitted under the age of twelve years. When they arrived at the priory they took up their residence at the guest-house, where they remained until it was ascertained if they possessed the qualifications necessary for admittance to the Order. Their health of both mind and body was tested, and if found suitable they were received on trial, and the novice's habit was given them after they had reached the age of fifteen; if the novice showed signs of having a true vocation, profession took place three years later. "When the prioress or mistress of novices perceived that the girl could not be taught 'letters,' nor take part in the services of the Church, they gave her the choice of becoming a lay-nun, who shared the dormitory and refectory of the nuns, but who worked when

the others read in the cloister, a lay-sister, or of leaving the house." The lay-sisters were professed at twenty, after a year's probation or noviciate. In times of heavy labour it was enjoined by the rule that the nuns should leave their reading or their prayers and help in the general work.

Another custom mentioned in the chronicle of the Order is interesting as showing the importance attached by St Gilbert to the rank and position of the nuns. "Three nuns kept all the money of the house. . . . The procurators had forty shillings in hand for small purchases to avoid frequent approach to the window to ask for money. Every purchase and sale was notified by writing to the nuns; no money could be spent, no wool, butter, cheese, or any property disposed of without their consent." When occasion arose for explanations about the spending or need of money, the matter was discussed at the window, four procurators and three nuns being present; "one spoke on each side in the third person." Each year after the accounts had been submitted to the General Chapter, and when all expenses had been paid, any money left over was devoted to "the poor of Christ," to provide for them softer beds and more comfortable coverings when they came seeking hospitality at the priory."

When a nun or sister was in danger of death, the sacristan gave notice of the fact by tolling the bell twice. Then four canons and a lay-brother entered the infirmary to administer the last sacraments in the presence of the nuns. After death the religious was clothed in the habit of the Order, and laid before the altar in the church, where the canons came and chanted "the service of the dead about her."

The duty of the lay-sisters was to do the work appointed them by the nuns, whom they were recommended to treat with very great respect, "ever to show them obedience, devotion, reverence, and honour, and in all ways to help their necessities." They were permitted to attend the church services when their work allowed, but instead of chanting the Divine Office they said certain prescribed prayers. Their work included washing, sewing, brewing, making thread for the cobblers, and weaving the wool for the house. Some idea of the extent of their labours will be gathered when it is noted that all the beer for each priory of men and women was brewed by the lay-sisters, and all the wool used in the making of the religious habits was woven by them. Possibly the times of heavy labour would be when the malt was supplied for brewing, and when the yearly stock of wool was

ready for weaving; at such times the nuns were recommended to help in the general work.

The foundation at St Catherine's, Lincoln, had been made, as explained in a previous chapter, for canons only, but nuns were admitted later on. The lay-sisters apparently helped in the hospital, for we find in the statement of miracles made at the canonisation of St Hugh of Lincoln, that the sisters in charge of the hospital testified to the genuine cure of a lame boy who had been under their care some years previously.

The priests, whom St Gilbert chose to help him in the administration of his convents for women, and who afterwards became known as Gilbertine canons, grew in time to be, if not the most important branch of the Order, yet certainly the most prominent. Although those selected in the first instance by the holy founder were already priests, for the need was urgent, yet later on boys were admitted into the monasteries to be trained and educated according to rule. They were received at the age of fifteen, but were not allowed to make their profession until they had completed their nineteenth year; ordination followed in due course. The reception of other scholars was prohibited lest they should interfere with the canons' daily duties, and the care they owed to the nuns.

The life of the canons was simple and austere. From Easter until September 14 they rose at midnight for Matins; Lauds followed immediately, then the religious retired to the "dorter" and slept until the bell roused them for Prime. This would probably be about four or five o'clock.

During the remainder of the year there was no rest allowed after midnight. In the interval between Lauds, which would be over about two o'clock, and Prime, which was not sung until the day had fairly dawned, the canons either prayed, or read, "sitting all together" in a place appointed by the prior. The nuns followed the same routine.

A modern biographer gives us a pleasing description of what took place in the nuns' choir on most nights of the year. "When Matins were over, all who chose remained behind in the church, or glided in afterwards from the cloister, and as day dawned, the first light of morning saw them upon their knees, pouring out their hearts to God, meditating on the adorable mysteries of the faith, or interceding for the world without, and for the friends whom they had left there."

There is no evidence to show what was the Gilbertine practice as regards reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, but as St Gilbert was a

faithful follower in many instances of Cistercian customs, it is interesting to read the account given in the life of St Stephen Harding of the usage at Citeaux. "The only object which Cistercian simplicity allowed on the high altar was a crucifix of painted wood, and over it was suspended a pyx, in which the Holy Sacrament was reserved, with great honour, in a linen cloth, with a lamp burning before it, night and day." The writer observes that the wording of the record from which the information is taken shows that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved "in a place not accessible to all."

When Lauds was chanted at dawn, Prime followed immediately; at other times the latter office was usually chanted about seven o'clock. High Mass was sung after Prime; any private masses to be said were celebrated before Tierce.

The younger members of the religious family, those under thirty, were allowed a slight refreshment called "mixtum," or breakfast, consisting of ale and bread. This they had in the middle of the forenoon, the hour varying according to the time of Tierce and Sext.

The chief, and in winter the only, meal of the day was taken at midday; the slight evening meal allowed in summer was served after

Vespers. The religious retired to rest in winter at seven, in summer an hour later.

Unlike the Cistercians, the Gilbertines were not encouraged to write, but the work was permitted. Probably they wrote and copied in so far only as the needs of the house required. The library and church books had to be replaced, repaired, and kept in good order.

They were warned in the rule against adopting an extravagant style in writing. "He who writes letters shall write simply, and above all shall avoid the vanity of profound and swelling words."

The tenderest care was bestowed upon the sick. They were placed in the infirmary, and waited upon with the greatest solicitude. Either the prior or the cellarer, whose business it was to look after the property of the house, celebrated Mass for them every morning in the infirmary, or in some oratory connected with it.

The rule of the lay-brothers was borrowed almost entirely from the Cistercians. The regulations laid down for the ordering of their life were simple and absolute. It was to be one of obedience, hard work, prayer, and mortification. This was made clear to them from the outset.

The age for admittance into the novitiate was

twenty-four, and immediately after reception they were set to "carting and other hard work."

The ceremony of admittance was solemn and impressive, and as in the case of aspirants to the rank of canon, the profession had to be made in the presence of the nuns. The "harshness and rigour of the rule" was explained to them previously, and also the responsibilities they were incurring by reception into the Order.

The rule of silence imposed upon the lay-brothers was strict. When their business or trade required it they might speak. Cobblers, smiths, bakers, weavers, and tanners are especially mentioned as being likely to stand in need of a dispensation on this point. There were many feast-days during the year, when servile work was as strictly prohibited as on Sundays. On these days the lay-brothers spent more time in church, attended the canons' chapter, and listened to the prior's sermon.

Great order and method governed the whole work of the priory and the granges; each department was overlooked and superintended by a canon or a lay-brother, who was nominated to the post of grainger. The lay-brothers and servants living in the granges were under the rule of the grainger, who filled the same office as the prior.

It was his duty to regulate the labour and “to see that all the lands of the farm were sown with the seed that best suited them.” There was “a brother of the hostel” at the grange as at the priory, and it was his charge to send to the nuns supplies of eggs, fruit, and honey. Honey was an important item in the storehouses of the Sempringham priories, and the care of bees must have been one of the most important charges of the grainger.

The number of horses and oxen kept, as also the measure of their daily food, was regulated by the council of the priory, and an account of these things was kept and submitted in the yearly chapter. That all connected with the monastery might be decorous and free from a tone of worldliness, the horses “were docked of their tails and manes,” and the saddles kept at the granges were to have “humble trappings” for the same reason. It was also enjoined that animals—ox, ass, horse, or foal—should be treated gently, and with kindness, and this not on humane grounds only, but in order that they should be kept whole and sound for the use of the Order.

The entire community of nuns, lay-sisters, canons, and lay-brothers, went in solemn procession round the nuns’ cloister on certain great

days in the year. These included the principal feasts of the Church, to which were added, after the canonisation of the founder, the day of "the burial of St Gilbert, and the feast kept in commemoration of the translation of his relics."

CHAPTER XI

RELATIONS WITH PRIMATE AND KING

THE Gilbertines held lands in five English counties, and notwithstanding many privileges owed service in several of the great forests, including Whittlewood in Northamptonshire. These scattered possessions, with their attendant duties, involved the labour of cultivation and protection, and were no doubt visited in regular order by the grainger and his assistants. Whittlewood Forest lies about ten miles south of Northampton, and the most convenient road between it and South Lincolnshire was through the county town.

The great Benedictine monastery, built by the famous Norman baron, Simon de Liz, was at this time one of the most imposing buildings in Northampton. It stood a short space from the castle, close to the town wall and the north gate. The monks were Cluniacs, and their monastery for some hundreds of years after its foundation was connected with many historic scenes. Here

St Thomas à Becket lodged when cited to appear before the King in the great council of 1164, and here the Gilbertine brethren sought hospitality when journeying between Whittlewood and Sempringham. One of them happened to be in St Andrew's Monastery on the last day of the famous council, and was privileged to play an important part in the subsequent flight of the Archbishop.

It is not proposed to enter here into details of the great struggle between Becket and the King. It will suffice to say that the former opposed the King in matters concerning the liberties of the Church, and that Henry retaliated by the imposition of heavy and ruinous fines.

After the last meeting of the council, Becket retired again to the monastery, and ordered a great supper to be prepared for the poor of the town, whom he had bidden to the feast.

They came in crowds, and he made all welcome. Like a father he sat at table with them and cheered them by his genial hospitality.

In the meantime preparations for flight were going hastily forward. The Gilbertine lay-brother undertook to guide the Archbishop safely to Lincoln.

Late in the evening, the escape was effected.

A small party of muffled figures hurried from the abbey grounds to the north gate of the town. The watch was not yet set, and the fugitives passed unquestioned through. Outside the walls horses were in readiness. These they mounted in silence, and with the same secrecy and speed passed into the darkness. The rain fell in torrents throughout that long October night. The "poor brother of Sempringham" proved an able and trusty guide. He knew the roads well, and chose the most lonely and unfrequented paths, trusting thus to elude pursuit should the Archbishop's absence be discovered.

The travellers rode steadily all night. The heavy rain soaked the Archbishop's cloak through and through, making it of so great weight that he could scarcely bear it upon his shoulders. Twice before morning the party halted to relieve the prelate of some of his burden by cutting away a portion of the cloak.

At Grantham they made a short stay for rest and refreshment, and then pushed on to Lincoln. Thomas was housed by the Gilbertines, not in their own priory, nor with persons of distinction, but in the dwelling of a poor man, "a fuller, by name James." Here he was safe.

During the next fortnight he lay in hiding,



CHICKSAND PRIORY, BEDFORDSHIRE (FROM ENGRAVING DATED 1829)

resting in the daytime, and travelling by night. The Gilbertines were his faithful guides, and often also his hosts.

Some days were spent at the small Priory of Hoyland-in-the-fens, forty miles from Lincoln. Here the Archbishop was comparatively safe, for the country was wellnigh inaccessible to all except the fen-dwellers themselves. Whilst here the Archbishop shared the humble fare of the brethren, and followed their exercises of piety and devotion.

The plight of Becket during his short stay at Hoyland, and the humility with which he accepted the Gilbertines' kindness, were such as sensibly to affect the brother who attended to his wants. On one occasion when he had served his honoured guest with the usual simple monastic fare, he could not restrain his tears, but immediately went out of the hermitage, that his grief might not disturb "the man of God."

After leaving the fens the Archbishop journeyed southwards, but not always directly. Often, in order to avoid detection, he changed his route, and went out of his course. He made a short stay at Chicksand Priory in Bedfordshire, and there was most hospitably entertained by the Gilbertines. A canon, named Gilbert, was at that time attached to the monastery. The

Archbishop, being struck with his piety and learning, begged him to accompany him on his way. This the priest did, most likely as chaplain.

Thomas and his companions reached Eastry in Kent towards the end of October. He sailed thence on November 2, and safely reached Oye, near Gravelines, on the evening of the same day.

The Sempringham brethren returned to their priories, but rumours of the assistance they had rendered the fugitive prelate had already got abroad, and very soon brought trouble to the Order.

When Henry II. found that the Archbishop had escaped, he immediately confiscated his estates, and seized the revenues of any ecclesiastics who had followed him into France or sent him pecuniary assistance. The King was in great dread of the sentence of excommunication or of an interdict, and issued a decree threatening with severe penalties any clerk who should bring such a sentence into the kingdom.

As already stated, reports were afloat touching help given to the Archbishop of Canterbury by Gilbert and his brethren. These soon reached the ears of the King's representatives. A summons was issued early in 1165, bidding the Master of Sempringham, with certain of his

priors, attend at Westminster to answer diverse charges made against them.

The chief of these was that Gilbert had sent money across the sea to Thomas à Becket. This accusation did not come as a surprise, for many of the prelate's friends had been persecuted and banished for a like offence, but it was grave enough to cause alarm. If proved, it meant exile for the defaulters, and probably for the Order.

The Earl of Leicester was High Justiciar, and the Gilbertines' case was tried in his court. He was in sympathy with the Archbishop, and unwilling to act against the Church. Gilbert's name also, was respected throughout England, and his character for integrity, benevolence, and courage well known to his judges. These elements strengthened the case of the Master of Sempringham, and the great desire of the court appears to have been to find some safe plea on which to acquit him.

Eventually it was proposed that Gilbert should take an oath that he had not sent supplies to Becket. If he would justify himself in this way he was free to depart with his canons. The offer was refused. Gilbert saw at once that such an oath would imply disapproval of an act which he considered good, and also that it would savour of

disloyalty to the Archbishop and to the Church. The priors were thrown into a state of consternation when they learnt the Master's decision. Some amongst them were inclined to think that the oath might be lawfully taken by individual canons to save the situation, saying "that it was not right to leave the places of their profession for such a cause." Gilbert, however, had no fear and no hesitation; his cause was just, and his trust was in God.

The Master's frame of mind during the anxious days of waiting in London was in direct contrast to that of his sons. He was quiet and cheerful; they were restless and despondent. He sought only the will of God; they were distracted with fear about their own safety, and that of the Order.

A simple little story of this time has been preserved, and is worth repeating, being very characteristic of St Gilbert.

One day he and his priests were waiting as usual in the law-courts expecting to hear news of their cause or to be called by the judges. The canons were weary and dispirited. The Master tried in vain to cheer them. His trust in God was unshaken, but he could not inspire them with the like confidence.

There was a boy in the hall selling trifles for

the amusement of the waiting crowd of courtiers, clients, and others. Gilbert, determined to find some means of rousing his brethren from their despondency, betook himself to the vendor's store, and selected some tricks or games, with which he returned to his little company, and forthwith set to work to distract them with his purchases.

No doubt appreciation of their Master's solicitude aroused them to some show of enthusiasm, and probably won for the game more credit than was its due.

By the cheerfulness of his own manner he showed how little concerned he was with the law's decision. He jested with his sons on their anxiety; when in their lodgings he strove to put into their hearts some of his own child-like confidence in God, for he counted it all joy to have "fallen into divers tribulations." During the weeks which the Gilbertines had to pass in London, the Master took care that, as far as possible, they should follow the same rule as that enjoined in the monasteries. They chanted daily the Divine Office, and one historian remarks that this astonished their city neighbours, for "it was a novel thing to hear in London the voices of a set of canons fresh from the fens of Lincolnshire."

At last, when the trial had been much prolonged, relief came. The Earl of Leicester had sent messengers to the King in France to know what course he was to pursue in dealing with the Gilbertines. The answer sent to the hesitating judges was that Gilbert and his canons were to go in peace, and that the King himself would deal with their case when he returned from Normandy. Then Gilbert informed the judges that he had not sent any money to the Archbishop, and explained the reason of his silence. All wondered at his firmness and admired his intrepidity.

Henry II. held in great esteem the holy founder and the Order of Sempringham, and this may account for the lenient view he took of the charge brought against them. The sequel to the affair added to the high opinion he already held of the saint.

There does not appear to have been any further notice taken of the charges against the Gilbertines. The King always showed the best side of his character in dealing with the holy founder. The estimates given by historians of the character of Henry II. are as varied as they are numerous. In spite of faults grave enough to preclude all claim to greatness of soul or nobility of mind, there yet existed a better side to the monarch's character, a strong religious

sense which enabled him to make great atonement for great wrong-doing.

A modern historian, Mrs J. R. Green, in insisting upon this truth, says: "To the last, Henry looked upon the clergy as his best advisers and supporters. He never demanded tribute from churches or monasteries, a monkish historian tells us, as other princes were wont to do on the plea of necessity; with religious care he preserved them from unjust burdens and public exactions. By frequent acts of devotion he sought to win the favour of Heaven, or to rouse the religious sympathies of England on his behalf. In April 1177 he met at Rheims his old enemy the Archbishop of Rheims, and laid on the shrine of St Thomas a charter of privileges for the convent. On the 1st of May he visited the shrine of St Edmund, and the next day that of St Ethelreda at Ely. . . . A templar was chosen to be his almoner, that he might carry to the King complaints of the poor, which could not come to his own ears, and distribute among the needy a tenth of all the food and drink that came into the house of the King. . . . Behind Henry's darkest and sternest moods lay a nature quick in passionate emotion, singularly sensitive to affection, tender, full of generous impulse, clinging to those he loved with yearning fidelity and long patience."

In view of the great crime of Henry's reign, the murder of St Thomas à Becket, this estimate may appear too favourable, yet we have good grounds for believing that the King was innocent of any premeditated design upon the life of the Archbishop, and was genuinely grieved and distressed at the action of his men.

The King founded the Priory of Newstead-on-Ancholme in the year 1171, but there is little doubt that his friendship with Gilbert dated from an earlier period. Proofs of the esteem in which he held him and his Order are found in various charters granting gifts to Gilbertine houses, and to the Order in general. The most remarkable of these is that granted between 1155 and 1162, when St Thomas à Becket was Chancellor. Other grants were allowed and other privileges conferred, as detailed in a previous chapter. The drawing up of these deeds of gift would necessarily bring the founder and his patron into close and constant contact. In the preamble to the earliest document, the King affirmed that he took all the houses of the Order, together with the inmates, "nuns and canons," into "his own hand, custody, and possession." When the monasteries were dissolved by order of Henry VIII. the canons of Newstead still distributed alms yearly to the poor for the souls of their

founders, Henry II. and John. The distribution was made on the anniversaries of their death. The suppression of the Gilbertine houses took place about the year 1538-39, so that the effects of Henry's good deed, as regards Newstead, lived after him for wellnigh four hundred years.

Perhaps the most touching instances of royal favour in Gilbert's case were the marks of esteem manifested towards him in his old age. On one occasion when he had travelled to London on business connected with his Order, the King, hearing of his arrival and of his intention to seek an interview with him at court, hastened to forestall his wishes, and, with a long retinue of lords and gentlemen, waited upon the humble founder in his simple lodging. Here he fell upon his knees before the aged saint and reverently craved his blessing. After such a meeting there can be little doubt as to the success of Gilbert's mission. It was during one of these visits to London that Queen Eleanor went with the young princes to beg the same favour—the benediction of the founder of the Order of Sempringham. The fame of his sanctity and the wonderful beauty of holiness which emanated from his countenance and his person evoked the veneration and love of all classes of society, not in the fen country and

the cities only, but throughout the length and breadth of England.

The Gilbertine canon who chronicles all these events in the life of his founder and friend affirms that he has seen high dignitaries of the Church, bishops of his own country, and prelates from foreign lands kneeling for the blessing of the humble canon, for Gilbert, in those later days, had ceased to act as Master. Relics of his garments were coveted and carried away not only by the simple and devout, but by learned and distinguished persons who recognised the saint beneath the meek and lowly exterior.

There is a story told about St Gilbert which may belong to this time of his life, though more probably to an earlier period. He was in London engaged, as always during these visits, on the business of his Order. A fire broke out in the house where he and his priests had their lodging. At the first alarm all was confusion and the inmates of the house, the brethren included, fled in terror. They entreated Gilbert to follow, but apparently did not stay either to see if their advice was taken, or to aid their father in the flight. Presently, not seeing him in the crowd, they returned and found him in his own room quietly engaged in prayer. The flames had devoured all the surrounding building and part of



ST. MARY'S OLD MALTON (EXTERIOR)

the house in which he was, but had left untouched the room in which he prayed, and also that part of the house immediately adjoining.

Henry II. continued his patronage of the Gilbertines not only during the founder's lifetime, but throughout his own. Besides the distinctly English character of the Order, perhaps another reason for the favour shown it was that it sent no money abroad. Other religious orders either sent supplies to their houses on the Continent, or were credited with so doing. Henry II., however, esteemed St Gilbert on other grounds besides these; he admired his grand and noble character, his disinterestedness, and the tact and dignity which enabled him to maintain his point without causing irritation to opponents by rash words, or impetuous demeanour. It will be recorded in due place and time how sincerely the King mourned his death, and how when he heard of it he paid great tribute of praise to the saintly character of the Master of Sempringham.

CHAPTER XII

THE REBELLION OF THE LAY-BROTHERS

ABOUT the year 1168, when Gilbert was nearly eighty years old, there befell him the greatest trial of his life. Since the days of his early manhood he had enjoyed a reputation for prudence and piety, and had been held in high esteem by all classes of society. His Order had grown and developed; it had become a source of edification to the world, of sanctification to its members, and of consolation to himself. Thus serenely and peacefully the years of maturity and middle age had passed away. Gilbert had been happy in his labours, for they were visibly blessed by God. He had never wearied in well-doing, and had rarely lacked encouragement. The counsel of the wise had been his for the asking, and the approbation of the Church solace and refreshment in the heat of the hottest day of strife. The visible protection of Providence had lightened every cross, and had been consolation in every trial. Now all earthly

support was to fail, and he was to go alone through the valley of humiliation. The suspicion and condemnation of good and holy people is a trial to which God has subjected many of His saints. This was now to be Gilbert's portion. As the days of his childhood had been clouded with sorrow, so those of his old age were to be passed beneath the shadow of the cross.

It has been shown that the Order of Sempringham was organised on a somewhat complex system. The circumstances of the times were such that lay-brothers had become a necessity. The monasteries were vast homesteads, the very existence of which called for workers to maintain life and order. Servants both paid and voluntary were needed, but the latter soon outnumbered the former, and hence sprang up that band of humble yet skilled workmen who were known as lay-brothers. Their tasks were varied and their influence great, for they were constantly thrown into communication with people of the world. They tilled the monastery lands, bought and tended the monastery sheep, horses and cattle, purchased in the country markets such provisions as were required, and disposed by sale of all surplus land produce.

It is probable that the supervision of the lay-brothers was less vigilant than in the Cistercian

Order, for the Gilbertine system was more unwieldy. All went well so long as the administration was in strong and capable hands. Gilbert knew the general work of his Order, and he knew the workers. He kept personally in touch with the four classes of his subjects, and by a combination of those qualities which make for good government, he guided his Order "over rough places and smooth, over heights and in the depths." But with advancing years came a decline of physical and it may be also of intellectual power. The spiritual force, however, grew stronger in the soul of the Master of Sempringham as the natural powers decayed. It was this religious sense, this burning charity and perfect abandonment into the hands of God, which sustained him in the hour of his greatest and sorest need.

The lay-brothers were much more numerous than the priests. The task of directing and controlling them was one of great difficulty, and one which their superiors often failed to accomplish.

For some time previous to that of which we are writing, there had been a spirit of discontent and unrest rife amongst the brethren. Murmurers were heard complaining of excessive work set, of the quality and quantity of food,

and, in short, of everything connected with the administration of their affairs. The story of the rebellion which eventually broke out is told briefly and concisely by Gilbert himself. He says: "The leaders in this dissension and discord were two lay-brothers to whom, in preference to others, I had entrusted the care of all our houses. With them were associated two others. One of these I received when he was almost a beggar, seeking his living by weaving. The other, Ogger the smith by name, I received as a boy before he was a smith, and with him his three brothers, unskilled in any trade, his poverty-stricken father, who was all but worn out, his aged mother, and her two beggar daughters, who had long been ill. I allowed Ogger and one of his brothers to be taught the trade of a smith in our Order, the other two brothers that of a carpenter. These and other brothers rose up against me and our canons. God knows that they lied, and they spread evil reports of us in many places." It has been surmised that "the two others" whom Gilbert does not name were persons of more importance than the smith and the weaver; however, there is no conclusive evidence to prove this, and as Ogger and Gerard are mentioned throughout the accounts of the affair as the ringleaders,

we may safely suppose that they were the chief offenders.

Matters at length came to a climax. A band of lay-brothers, with Ogger and Gerard at their head, refused to work. They took possession of horses belonging to the Order, and rode about the country complaining of the Master, the canons, and the rule. The strange sight of these rustic religious wandering about the lanes on their "stolen palfreys" excited and amused the common folk, who listened eagerly to their tales, and readily sided with them against their superiors. These villagers were of their own class. Ogger and Gerard would gather a crowd together and harangue them upon the tyranny and injustice practised towards them. Amongst the listeners were relatives and friends who naturally sympathised with their kindred. So the strife spread. The priests, as they went about their work, were greeted with looks of sullen dislike and defiance.

When the holy founder realised the extent to which the rebellion had grown, he took strong measures to stop its progress. He publicly condemned the chief offenders, and issued an order that all the brothers should take an oath to keep the promises made at their profession. This was actually almost equivalent to asking

for a second profession, and was, later on, made the ground for special and grave complaint against the Master. To demand a second profession was a very unusual course to advocate or enforce. The shrewdness which detected this weak point in Gilbert's later defence suggests the idea that either there were thinking men amongst the brothers, or that they had abettors and counsellors outside their own ranks.

Ogger and Gerard enriched themselves from the priory stores. They took without scruple all that they desired. As they could not induce Gilbert to give them a more easy and comfortable rule they decided to go to Rome and appeal to the Pope. With a vigour worthy of a better cause they planned the journey and set out.

Having "grown rich with plunder," as the Sempringham chronicler says, they were able to travel with some show of respectability. Arrived in Rome they presented themselves with every appearance of religious submission to the Pope. He received them with great kindness. The lay-brothers poured out their tale with extreme volubility, and with apparent truthfulness. The Master they represented as harsh and severe, the canons as relaxed in discipline, the rule of the lay-brothers as inconsistent with their work.

The tale was plausible, and the Pope was quite

deceived. He listened with sympathy, and assured the petitioners that their grievances should be redressed. Ogger and Gerard were well pleased. They knew that Gilbert would not withstand the Pope. The facility with which these two men, who had sprung from the lowest class of society, obtained the ear and the sympathy of Alexander III. proves that the Pope was in truth the Father of Christendom.

Shortly afterwards he issued a decree bidding Gilbert take them back into the Order, and said further that the founder had overstepped his powers in demanding the oath. Gilbert accepted this decision without protest, although he felt that it was "a cruel mandate." He knew that the Pope had been deceived, yet submitted patiently, leaving his cause in the hands of God, believing He would in His own time bring good out of evil. He announced to the lay-brothers that they would be readmitted into the religious family. Gilbert knew how grievously he and his religious had been calumniated by the rebels, yet at the word of obedience he put aside all feelings of resentment and received them back.

Emboldened by the success of their schemes the brothers then came in a body to the Master and demanded a mitigated rule. This was

refused, and they were further told that until they had submitted to the discipline of the monastery their demand would not even be considered. They were also required to show by their conduct that they meant to live in accordance with the vows of their profession. Ogger and Gerard were still rebellious, and continued to stir up strife and disunion. Soon they again left the enclosure and resumed their former custom of parading themselves and their grievances throughout the surrounding country. The result of their accusations now became serious, and Gilbert was summoned from one court to another to answer the charges brought against himself or his brethren. The attack was usually directed against the canons. He pleaded that as Master of the Order he alone could release members from the promises of their profession. The Pope had confirmed the constitutions, and until this approbation was revoked no other superior, either ecclesiastical or secular, had power to make him alter his rule. They could only urge him to enforce it. Many bishops pressed the founder to make peace at the price of a mitigated rule, but he stood firm.

The Master, now an old man weak with the weight of eighty years, and verging on the grave, was as steadfast in matters of principle as in the days of his most vigorous manhood. When the

integrity of his Order was at stake he was inflexible in the maintenance of discipline, and as dauntless in defence as in attack.

The disapproval shown towards him by the exiled Archbishop of Canterbury was perhaps the bitterest draught which Gilbert had at this time to drink from the chalice of suffering. Becket wrote rebuking him severely for disobedience to the Pope, and blaming him for the scandal caused in England by the rupture in his Order. The rumours which had reached Normandy of the Gilbertine troubles were unreliable, and Becket had been deceived. It is clear that he thought the founder in fault, for he condemns him severely for not having received the brothers back according to the Pope's command. As we have seen, this he had already done, but it is possible that the second defection of Ogger and Gerard may have led to misconceptions. The Archbishop reminded Gilbert that disobedience to the Pope's commands "was as the sin of idolatry," and that the Lord had said, "Woe to him by whom scandal cometh." It was known to all, he continued, to our Lord Himself, to Gilbert, and to the whole Order, that he had ever loved and protected them above all other Orders, and therefore was he the more troubled when the news of such scandals reached his ears.

He then went on to say that the Pope had entrusted to him the correction of abuses, and therefore he bade Gilbert, under sentence of anathema, to read the Pope's letters and his own to all the members, and to labour to remove immediately the grounds of dissension which were the cause of so much disedification.

Perhaps the sternness of his rebukes troubled the Archbishop when the letter was written, for he concluded in gentler terms. He advised the founder to mitigate the rule "lest after his days it should perish." The want of confidence, or want of knowledge evidenced by Becket's letter must have been as "a sorrow's crown of sorrow" to the maligned and wellnigh broken-hearted saint. It seemed a poor return for the noble way in which the Gilbertines had championed the Archbishop's cause. They had courted disgrace and exile sooner than take up a position which might throw even the slightest doubt on their loyalty to him and to the Church. Becket was, no doubt, in ignorance of the perils braved for his sake. The condemnatory accounts which had reached him of the part taken by Gilbert in the affair of the lay-brothers left him no freedom of opinion. He wrote believing the founder was mistaken in his course of action, but equally certain that he would right the wrong.

This reprimand did not shake Gilbert's purpose, though doubtless it saddened his heart. The Sovereign Pontiff alone was his superior, when acting as Master of Sempringham. He knew, moreover, that the Archbishop would have been the first to approve his conduct had he been rightly informed of the circumstances.

In the letter to Gilbert already quoted, the Archbishop speaks of the Order of Sempringham as "the first fruits of our labours," but there is nothing to prove that he had taken any part in its foundation.

CHAPTER XIII

ST GILBERT IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL COURT— TRIAL AND ACQUITTAL

As the blackest night ever precedes the dawn, so when the clouds hung darkest over Sempringham the sun broke through and dispelled the gloom. At the time when Gilbert's case seemed the most hopeless, help came. The clamour of tongues raised against him and his aroused the attention of friends in high places, and the unseemly conduct of the accusers helped to turn the tide of public opinion. The King, several of the bishops, and the Papal Legate took up Gilbert's defence. Letters and petitions were sent to Rome on his behalf.

Of all the bishops who espoused his cause, William, Bishop of Norwich, was the most zealous and devoted. He had been born and bred in Norwich and was made Bishop during the reign of Stephen. He was consecrated by Archbishop Theobald, and became a bold and energetic defender of the rights of the Church. His

memory has been perpetuated by the zeal with which he advocated the claim of the boy called "little St William of Norwich" to rank as a martyr. The common report was that the Jews, out of hatred for Christianity, had put him to death. This story was popularly believed, although the truth of it was early called in question, and in some instances wholly denied. The Bishop of Norwich so earnestly defended the truth of the martyrdom that his name has come down to posterity linked with that of "little Saint William." It may be useful to note that neither this boy-saint of Norwich, nor other children about whom similar stories were told, have ever been officially recognised by the Church as either saints or martyrs.

The Bishop was also a personal friend and partisan of Becket. He never faltered in his allegiance to him, and he is perhaps the only English bishop of the time about whom this can be said.

One story about the Bishop of Norwich is so characteristic of the man that it may suitably be told here. He had become involved in a quarrel with the Earl of Norfolk, a powerful and influential noble. The task of pronouncing sentence of excommunication against the offending Earl was laid upon the Bishop. The duty was perilous.

Fear, however, was unknown to him, and in the crowded cathedral he read the dreaded sentence in a loud and clear voice. He then calmly proceeded with the service, and when all was finished quietly passed out of the sacred edifice through a crowd of the Earl's angry retainers, with as fearless a mien as Becket himself when he strode out of the council chamber at Northampton.

To this brave champion of truth and right the Pope committed Gilbert's cause. He deputed him to inquire into all the circumstances of the case, to hear the complaints of the lay-brothers, the defence of the Master and his priests, and to report to Rome the result of his investigations. It is from these reports, which have been preserved, that the fullest light is thrown on the affair. The accusations were for the most part directed against the canons. They had been, indeed, throughout the rebellion the chief cause of contention. Jealousy of what the lay-brothers considered the comfortable life of the Sempringham priests, lay at the root of the discontent. They acted as masters in temporal, and superiors in spiritual matters, so that there was ample opportunity for cavil, if disloyalty already reigned. The first accusation against Gilbert was that of having imposed the oath of fidelity to

which allusion has already been made. This act was considered unlawful, inasmuch as he exceeded his powers in forcing the oath or second profession upon the brethren. A further accusation was brought against him from a source now unknown. This charged him with having disregarded letters from the Pope, and also with having excommunicated the bearer.

The Bishop of Winchester, whom the Pope had named to aid in the hearing of the case, being too ill to attend, "certain other religious" were summoned in his stead. Gilbert's answers to the charges were: In the first place, that he had long since absolved the lay-brothers in the presence of the Bishop of Lincoln from their second oath—he denied that he had ever forced upon them a second profession; secondly, that he had, in accordance with the Pope's command, willingly readmitted them to the Order; and thirdly, that he had never received any letters from the Pope, and therefore could not have disregarded them or excommunicated the bearer. Gilbert finally agreed to accede to the wishes of the lay-brothers in so far as to allow them the use of the priests' oratory in each priory.

The Bishop wrote the result of his inquiries to Rome, and besides citing Gilbert's answers as

given above, alleged that the brethren were quite innocent of the charges brought against them. Later he wrote a second letter to the Pope, which is worth quoting, as it shows clearly the estimation in which the Gilbertines and their founder were held :

“To the most holy father and sovereign Alexander,—William, Bishop of Norwich, the servant of his Holiness sendeth greeting and obedience. . . . Gilbert of Sempringham, both from his near neighbourhood to me, as well as from the renown of his sanctity, for which he is so eminent, cannot be unknown to me. His soul is the dwelling of wisdom, and he draws from the fountains of the Holy Spirit those waters which he knows so well how to pour into the ears of others. In winning and retaining souls for God, he is so zealous and successful, that when I compare myself with him I am ashamed of my own slothfulness, and it seems as if the prophet Isaias were chiding such as I am, when he says, ‘Be ashamed, O Sidon, saith the sea.’ Among his nuns, of whom he hath gathered for God a multitude greater than I can number, there burns such a fervid zeal for religion, and careful love of chastity, and so carefully do they keep apart, that they realise that Scripture which saith, ‘My Beloved is for me, and I for Him Who feedeth

among the lilies.' Of his canons, whose innocence, I hear, has been calumniated to your clemency, I call God and my own soul to witness, I never remember to have heard a single word of ill-fame, and I could not but have heard it from their near neighbourhood to me, and from the multitude of persons who come to me on business. . . . From his lay-brethren he only requires that they keep inviolate that mode of life which they have professed, and this, in my presence, they have promised with much devotion to do. He does not presume to change what has been confirmed by your authority, and that of your predecessors, and what they after long trial have promised and vowed to observe, lest if he change it he might be open to the charge of laxity and presumption. All I wish is that this law-suit, which certain lukewarm men, of cold charity, have entered against him, should be referred to the judgment and witness of men who have a zeal for God according to knowledge, that they may discover the truth by inspecting the privileges granted by the Apostolic See, and by the clear examination of facts, men who have known and experienced what it is to observe a rule without tiring of the religious life, or looking back after putting their hands to the plough. A man worn out by age, and more full of virtue than of days,

ought not to be treated so, that through discouragement he should swerve from his purpose to the detriment of many souls, but be rather encouraged and treated with gentleness, that he may persevere to keep alive the salvation which God has worked by him in our land. Daily doth the wheat grow thin in the garner of the Lord, and the chaff is multiplied. May God preserve your Holiness in safety for His Church. Farewell."

The Bishop wrote also to Gilbert "as to his other self," striving to cheer and comfort him in his trials, and assuring him of his affection, trust, and confidence.

Other ecclesiastics bore testimony to the regular life of the canons. The most noted of these was Roger, Archbishop of York, who asserted that the priories of Sempringham in his diocese were "honestly and religiously ruled." This statement he supplements and reiterates in a joint letter which he wrote with Hugh de Puiset, Bishop of Durham. They both testified to the good discipline and fervour prevailing in the Gilbertine houses, especially in that of Malton. Henry of Blois, who was Bishop of Winchester, the Prior of the Austin canons at Bridlington, and other dignitaries of the Church, wrote to Rome to the same effect. The Pope was satisfied

after receiving these letters that he had been misled in his estimate of the Order and its founder, and he determined to make amends as far as possible for the injustice already done.

The most influential of all Gilbert's advocates came forward at the last. This was the King. His power alone would have sufficed to rehabilitate the Gilbertines. It was exercised, however, when the cause was all but won and served to make "assurance double sure." Henry II. was not a man to take half-measures. Hearing of the troubles which had befallen Gilbert, he wrote a curt and emphatic letter to Alexander III., saying that if anything was changed in the Order, any relaxations or mitigations forced upon it contrary to the wish of the founder, or if the Institute was changed by the machinations of "the rustics," as he called the lay-brothers, who were "the bondsmen of the soil," he would take away all "the domains and possessions" granted to it by himself and his nobles. On the other hand, if the Pope consented to support Gilbert in his endeavour to maintain the integrity of the rule and commanded the constitutions to be kept in their primitive rigour, he would do all in his power to support and uphold the Order, and would ever hold it in great reverence and honour.

The advocacy of Henry II., who was not in any

sense a loyal son of the Church, was due, no doubt, to the fact that he had inherited from his grandfather, Henry I., the title of patron of the Order of Sempringham. As already shown, the Gilbertines were held in special esteem by successive kings on account of the wholly English character of their congregation.

The Pope was prompt in restitution. He sent a mandate forbidding anyone to alter the rule without the founder's consent, and granted to Gilbert and to his successors the power to prevent any person from adding to, or correcting, or altering the religious laws, and reasonable institutions, without the consent of "the wiser part of the Order." Besides this confirmation, Alexander granted to the Gilbertines many new privileges, and renewed those already allowed by his predecessors.

During all the persecutions to which he was subjected, Gilbert retained peace of mind and determination of purpose. As Master of Sempringham, he, more than anyone, was concerned in the maintenance of discipline and rigour. To secure this he had withstood those whom naturally he revered and trusted. When convinced of the justice of his course, the requests of bishops did not move him, nor the prayers of his religious family; nor was his strength of

purpose slackened by the infirmities of old age or the weakness consequent upon failing health. During the earlier stages of the rebellion, he had been under the apparent displeasure of the Pope; he had been looked upon with disapproval by prelates, and openly censured by ecclesiastics; the populace had pointed at him the finger of scorn, and his own disobedient sons had rejoiced in and added to these humiliations. Gilbert was by nature most sensitive and refined. He felt an insult "like a wound," yet so securely had he anchored his soul in the sea of Divine Love that exterior storms had no power to move him, though they might for a time disturb the calm surface of his spirit. Although he suffered from the opprobrium heaped upon him, yet his feelings never influenced his judgment. He would have borne the burden of dishonour to the grave sooner than purchase relief by the slightest deviation from the path of rectitude. He would have fought to the death in the cause of God and His Church, yet coercive measures were ever repugnant to him.

Gilbert was by nature gentle and gracious; tenderness and pity for the suffering were the natural growth of his disposition, as was also that wide-reaching charity which knew no limits, and which led him to take to his heart all the children of his Divine Master. When at length the dis-

pute with the lay-brothers came to an end, when they, after their temporary triumph, had failed to make good their accusations, and when finally judgment had been given against them, then the Master enforced his rule of complete submission to lawful authority. The brethren made no stand against this, but sincerely and humbly confessed their fault and sought forgiveness. They made, at the same time, with great deference, a petition for some slight mitigation of the rule, expressing their willingness, however, to submit in all things to the Master's decision.

Gilbert received their submission with gentle dignity, and, as the chronicler records, "with the kiss of peace." He promised to consider their petition, and if found advisable, to amend with the Pope's permission, what might be too rigorous for their observance. With this concession union was restored.

Life in the priories resumed its usual course. All the lay-brothers, save one, returned contentedly to their work. Ogger alone remained obdurate. He continued to lead a disorderly life, but did not succeed in again seducing the brethren, nor did his animosity seriously disturb the peace of the monasteries. For many years, however, he was a thorn in the side of the founder.

The old chronicler calls him "the hammer of Gilbert," from which we may infer that he brought much sorrow to his former benefactor.

With advancing years the distinguishing characteristics of the priest and the soldier became, in the Master, more strongly blended. The spirit of the knight showed bravely when he set to work to repair the rupture in his Order. The lay-brothers, humiliated and repentant, were to him objects of the tenderest solicitude.

The defeated brothers, formerly serfs on his own land, had a double claim upon his bounty. They were his sons in the bonds of holy religion, and they were the poor of Jesus Christ. The heart of the founder went out to them with a great pity, and although he insisted upon faithful observance of rule, yet he began to consider the grounds of their grievances. He endeavoured to see the matter from the brothers' standpoint, not an easy task for one who ever found sweetness in austerity.

He worked slowly and cautiously, waiting, as of yore, upon Divine Providence. No changes were made for some years. In the meantime the original regulations remained in force. The brethren were content, because they knew that the Master was mindful of them. Compliance on his part meant comprehension, not a want of

moral force. They did not doubt his justice, but their appeal was to his mercy. The chivalrous courtesy which was so conspicuous a part of Gilbert's disposition caused his dealings with the lay-brothers, even in most critical circumstances, to be distinguished as much by graciousness as by gravity of behaviour.

Human nature does not change. The influences which controlled the heart of man in Gilbert's time control and attract it still. Magnanimity and generosity may, in the hands of the conqueror, become magnets of irresistible strength, whose force the humiliated foe is powerless to resist. So has it ever been.

The sympathy which sprang up, after the repression of the rebellion, between the founder and his poorer brethren was of so strong and lasting a nature that it not only firmly cemented the union already accomplished, but also bound together the brothers, cleric and lay, with links that resisted all future pressure of time or place, and kept the Order united during the remaining three hundred and fifty years of its existence.

The changes advocated by the lay-brothers were, as has been said, in some measure effected, but they were not solemnly instituted until after St Gilbert had resigned his office of Master. In or about the year 1187, in the presence of

St Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, and with the consent of the General Chapter, certain mitigations of rules relating to food and clothing were formally allowed.

So ended the dispute which had brought so much trouble upon the founder, and discredit to the Order.

Occasional mention is made of the lay-brothers in later years, but always as attendants on or retainers of the canons. At the spoiling of the priories under Henry VIII., no account of them is given. Probably when their religious homes were broken up they quietly dispersed, but history gives no clue as to the manner of their disappearance.

CHAPTER XIV

PROFESSION, LAST DAYS, AND DEATH

WHEN Gilbert was far advanced in years, his canons begged him to make his formal profession in the Order. They feared that otherwise after his death the King might claim the right to appoint as his successor a cleric outside the Order, and they considered that this danger would be obviated by his formal religious profession. Yielding to their solicitations, and perhaps influenced by the approval conferred upon the Order by the Holy See, he consented and received the canon's habit at Bullington, from the hands of Roger of Malton, his chief counsellor and confidant.

It is difficult to understand Gilbert's reluctance to take vows in his own Order. The reason given by his biographer that he thought "he might be branded with arrogance for swearing to live according to the rule which he had himself drawn up" seems insufficient. Perhaps he abstained from a scrupulous fear of responsi-

bility, or it may be that he was influenced by the thought that he could more freely devote himself to the well-being of his congregation if untrammelled by personal bonds. Whatever his motive, it had its source in unselfishness and the desire to do that which would most promote the glory of God and the sanctification of his Institute.

The infirmities of old age fell thick and fast upon Gilbert. Notwithstanding the weakness evidenced by his bent figure and emaciated form, his eye still retained its brightness and bespoke the alertness of the sound and healthy mind. As time went on, however, and extreme old age was neared, the continual night-watching, the tears shed out of love for his Lord, and sorrow for the sins of the world, the wind and rain and dust to which he had so long been exposed, told upon his failing sight, and he became quite blind. It was then that he resigned the charge of his Order into the hands of Roger of Malton, who was appointed Master in his stead. He did not, however, relinquish work when he gave up the burden of office, but continued the visitation of the priories, riding on horseback as long as his poor body could bear the strain. To form some idea of the pain and weariness of such a mode of travel at so great

an age, in such a period, it is necessary to remember the condition of England at the close of the twelfth century. The great Roman roads were probably in good repair, but were of little use to travellers seeking remote and sequestered places. The Gilbertine houses in Lincolnshire were for the most part removed from centres of traffic, and so situated that access to them was only possible through untrodden by-ways, or roughly made roads. Very pathetic and pitiful was the figure of the saint, bowed with age, "the bones scarce cleaving to his flesh," his face pallid and wasted, his eyes dim or sightless, bearing patiently the discomforts of riding and road. He continued to travel on horseback as long as he could maintain his seat; then his sons provided a litter and carried him about the country from one monastery to another. Even under these more favourable conditions the inconveniences were extreme. In spite of care on the part of the bearers, the old man suffered much from the jolting of the litter. Often as they carried him into boats and across streams, they would falter under their load, and then the kind and loving heart of the father suffered additional pain, of another sort, yet no less keen.

Notwithstanding the hardships of his journeyings, Gilbert mitigated none of his daily

austerities; in truth, it would be more correct to say that he increased them, for that which had been hard to nature in middle life, was trebly so in old age.

It is easy to understand the love and veneration with which the saintly founder was received in his various houses. His very presence was a stimulus to virtue; his words and example urged on his spiritual children to the sublimest heights of perfection. He always shared with his sons the inconveniences of the common life. His age and infirmities were sufficient excuse for dispensation from the rules regulating food and rest, yet he would never accept exemption on these grounds or on any other. Even when approaching his hundredth year he still ate and slept with his brethren. He would not allow them to serve his meals to him in the infirmary, though his sons often begged him to grant them this satisfaction. So long as Gilbert was able to take food at all he had himself carried down to the refectory and took the common fare in the common fashion. He answered remonstrances on this subject with the assertion that he would never "set an example to his successors of eating good things in his cell."

Another austerity which he imposed upon himself showed further his love of community

life. He would not sleep in "a place apart," but chose always to have his bed in the common dormitory, or "dorter" as it was called. This custom, to which he adhered throughout life, was a safe and sure channel of discomfort, and one which was specially dear to the humble saint, for it left no outlet for vainglory. Indeed it was always by "the common deeds of the common day" that Gilbert reached the noblest heights of sanctity. Old age craves peace and quiet retirement, yet these he denied himself. What torture must the noise and tumult of incessant comings and goings have been to his weak and sensitive nerves! We have seen how he managed when sleeping in the chamber of the Bishop of Lincoln to keep his nightly watches, and how he arose from his couch to pray. This practice he retained even in extreme old age. His sons strove to prevent him from making these nocturnal devotions, and in a common dormitory they had ample opportunity to watch and guard their father, but each night towards twelve o'clock they had to arise and repair to the church for the chanting of Matins. Probably this was Gilbert's opportunity, for then he could leave his bed without let or hindrance, and, unseen, pour out his heart in aspirations of love which were as the breath of his soul.

Once when discovered by his brethren in a kneeling posture by his bedside, he was disconcerted, and gently chid them, then he tried to make them believe that his bed was not well made, and that in being out of it he was seeking comfort.

After Gilbert's sight had failed he became more than ever absorbed in the vision of God. The thought of the mercies and goodness of his Saviour would cause the tears to flow down his cheeks. Often he would speak of things divine to the brethren, but always briefly; a few sentences would escape him, every word on fire with zeal and fervour, then he would relapse into silence; then again ejaculations would burst from him, and he would cry, "How long, O Lord, wilt Thou forget me?" "Woe is me, for the time of my sojourning is prolonged." Sometimes, when he thought that he had spoken too much, he would kneel down, and repeat the words of the confiteor with great sorrow and compunction, at the same time humbly begging absolution for his fault.

So the years sped on, and still Gilbert lingered on earth. It seemed as if his Lord had indeed forgotten him. The weak body was scarcely able to retain its hold upon the soul, which was yearning and pining "to be dissolved and to be

with Christ." It was not until more than a hundred years had been accomplished that the race was won; then the dissolution came, and the end was peace.

Historians do not agree as to Gilbert's exact age at the time of his death. The best informed amongst them say that he was born about the year 1089, and that his death took place in 1189. During the year 1188 he wrote farewell letters to the inmates of the different priories. That which he addressed to the canons of Malton has been preserved, and is so striking a reflection of the founder's holiness and teaching as to be worthy of quotation in full. He writes :

"MY DEAR SONS,—While God gave me power, whenever I came to visit you, I was wont to invite and draw you to the Divine Love as far as I could and knew how. Would that virtue followed on my care of you! But now I am almost destitute of bodily strength, and by putting off this robe of the flesh a way opens up for me to depart hence from life which has long been bitter and tedious to me. And now, since I cannot speak to you with my voice, by this letter I cease not to admonish you, for the love of God and for the safety of your souls, to watch more diligently than hitherto to repress vice, to

exalt justice, to observe the institutions and traditions of your Order, the more wakefully and strictly since you are free from the occupations with which the lay-brothers busy themselves, and you have the opportunity of exercising the rigour of the Order, that you may check the insolence of any delinquents. For this I have specially gathered you together, that our Order may be rightly ruled, protected, and exalted by the rigour of your religion. If you think my care for you has been of use to you, do not refuse to consider the hire of my labour, but entreat the clemency of the Lord with your most fervent prayers, that He enter not into judgment with me, but by His great sweetness may wipe away my sins and grant me everlasting rest. To you whom I leave behind me, I give the peace and mercy of God, His blessing, and my own. By the authority granted me by Him as far as I may, I absolve all who love our Order and defend it from all accusations which any have brought against its institutions through ignorance or infirmity, neglect or contempt. Let those who imagine mischief and strife against our congregation know that my absolution cannot avail them, since unless they repent before the Lord and make worthy satisfaction, they are accursed. None of you do I think guilty of this charge, but

I trust in you all that you will be more diligent than formerly in performing all things for the welfare of your souls, with the help of our Saviour, that my joy in your society may increase before the Lord, and that He Himself may be glad, Whose kingdom and power abide for ever and ever. Farewell."

Towards the end of the year it was evident that death could not be long delayed. Gilbert was at Newstead-on-Ancholme when his state of health first gave signs of immediate danger. The monastery was situated on an island in the River Rucholm, and was extremely bleak and desolate. It was mid-winter, and Christmas was at hand. We can only conjecture the reasons which brought the aged saint with his weight of one hundred years to such an inhospitable region at this inclement season. Doubtless it was the desire to do some act of kindness or courtesy which lured him across the barren fenland to this remote and secluded priory. We know our saint well enough to be sure that the star which led him to celebrate the birth of Christ at Newstead was as certainly a heaven-sent guide as that which of old led the kings of the East to Bethlehem.

On Christmas Eve Gilbert grew suddenly

worse, and the brethren became seriously alarmed. The last sacraments were administered to the dying saint.

His sons, knowing that it would be the wish of his Order that he should breathe his last at Sempringham, hastily made arrangements to carry him thither. His chaplains, with other canons, bore the precious burden tenderly throughout that sad and difficult journey.

Sempringham was forty miles distant from Newstead. They dared not carry their beloved father through frequented places for fear lest the faithful, hearing that the saint was dying, should detain them forcibly in order to lay his bones in some favourite shrine or monastery. Those were the days of faith, when the people of England valued nothing more highly than the relics of the saints. It was the age in which the great cathedrals arose, those wonders of man's love for his Maker, but dearly as the faithful prized these monuments of architectural beauty, they held the bodies of the blessed in greater reverence still. The Gilbertines therefore chose lonely and deserted roads, and travelled so slowly that they began to fear that their father would die by the way.

Sempringham was reached at last. Just a century before Gilbert had been born in that

quiet corner of Lincolnshire. His father's Norman mansion, perchance, still stood as in the days of yore by the old courtyard, but the face of the village was changed, and the change was due to him who was coming to die where he had first drawn breath. Smiling homesteads stood where wretched hovels had cumbered the earth. The land lay in the grip of winter, yet signs were not wanting to show that the hand of intelligent labour would soon help the earth to bring forth flower and fruit. The Church of St Andrew, once the sole edifice of beauty in that quiet hamlet, stood as of old in the green churchyard, but there had grown up at its right hand a pile of noble buildings, the culminating proof of the genius of the founder—the Priory of Sempringham. So Gilbert came home.

If imagination does not belie us, we can call up from the past a vision of the welcome which his children—sons and daughters—gave him; the reverence with which they met him on the threshold of the church; how he paid his visit of fealty to his Lord, for he was ever the knight of God; and how he blessed them all as his smiling, sightless face lit up with the old expression of joy and love, love for God and them, joy to be again in that dear home, the first he had laboured for, and built to shelter the brides

of Christ. They laid his worn and weary body reverently and tenderly in the infirmary of his first religious foundation. There all his priors came to visit him, and received his parting words of counsel with his last benediction.

The month of January passed quietly away. The hush of death was over priory and village; yet death delayed, and the lamp of life flickered fitfully.

On February 3 a change came. All day Gilbert lay in a state of semi-consciousness. Roger of Malton, his dearly loved son, watched by his bedside.

Presently the dying saint murmured the words, "He hath dispersed abroad and given to the poor." After a short space of silence he continued as though speaking in church, "Yes, He hath dispersed to many persons, He gave, He did not sell; it was to the poor, too, not to the rich." Was the tempter assailing him with the accusation of being an unprofitable servant? The import of the words uttered suggests the thought. Perhaps the arch-fiend, who ever pursues the holy with special hatred, was making one last violent assault upon the faith of the dying saint.

Presently he spoke again as though continuing his theme, and addressing the watcher by the

bedside, "'Tis thy place to do so now." The long hours of that last night on earth wore on. The silence of the sick-room was unbroken, save for the occasional sound of the voice of the dying saint, raised in prayer. Roger prayed too, and watched. He scarcely realised that the end was at hand, for his father had lain thus for hours. Life in the meantime was ebbing away.

In the early hours of the morning of February 4 the last summons came. From north, and south, and east, from lonely, fen-bound hamlet, and from stately priory church, there was rising to God the monastic hymn of praise. Gilbert's spiritual sons and daughters—"and the fruit of the virgins was an hundredfold"—were chanting Lauds.

The harmonious and solemn music of the sacred song carried the inspired words of the psalmist upwards to the throne of God—

"Sing joyfully unto God, all the earth : serve ye the Lord with gladness.

"Come in before His presence with exceeding joy.

"Know ye that the Lord He is God, He hath made us, and not we ourselves.

"We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

“Go ye into His gates with praise, and into His courts with hymns; and give glory unto Him.

“Praise ye His name: for the Lord is gracious, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth from generation to generation.”

Gilbert's life-work had been to advance the glory of God by the homage of service and praise. For this he had toiled and striven. It was fitting, therefore, that the virgins' song should herald his entrance into the heavenly kingdom. Would the angels' chorus which he should so soon hear glorify the Lord much more than those hymns of praise on earth?

To the chamber of death there came from the Priory Church faint echoes of the great psalms of praise. At the words of the lesson, “The night is past, and the day is at hand,” the eternal morning dawned for Gilbert. The soul so long imprisoned in its tenement of clay broke the bonds of the body, and with joy unutterable passed into the hands of its Creator.

CHAPTER XV

HONOUR IN DEATH

GILBERT'S death cast a deep sorrow over all the Order of Sempringham. His children loved him with an affection deep and tender, a love surpassing that of father, or friend, or family.

The Order numbered at the time of the founder's death seven hundred canons and fifteen hundred nuns. To each he was as a personal friend. His biographer tries in vain to describe the grief of the children at the loss of their father. Although they had long known that his sojourn with them must necessarily be short, yet his death, when at last it came, was a blow which crushed the hearts of all beneath its weight.

Seeking for words in which to express his tender care for his religious family and their sorrow at his loss, one of his sons wrote, "He gathered us as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing."

Gilbert was seen in vision at the time of his

death by several persons. Accounts of these manifestations have been preserved, and some particulars respecting them may be suitably introduced here.

A nun named Agnes of Apeltona living in a Yorkshire monastery (not of the Order of Sempringham) saw the saint in a dream. She gives the following description of her experience :

In the midst of a plain of exceeding loveliness she saw a great mansion or palace. To the west was a magnificent church. The people about the palace seemed to be engaged in making preparations for a grand funeral pageant. The nun understood that it was in honour of Master Gilbert of Sempringham, who was lately dead.

Presently she saw him, for he was well known to her, rise from the bier and take his staff in his hand. He then intoned, in a voice clearer and sweeter than any she had ever heard, the words of the hymn, " These the joys of purity in dulcet strains we show."

All the people standing round joined in the song, and still singing betook themselves to the church.

The nun watched the great ceremonial, and believing Gilbert, whom she saw moving in the procession, to be still living, whereas she had been

told he was dead, she became perplexed, and with some annoyance asked how this could be. It was made known to her that he was indeed dead, but that eternal reward was prepared for him in Heaven. As St John the Evangelist had received recompense unending for his protection of the mother of the Lord, so should Gilbert be rewarded for his care of those who imitated the life and virtues of that most glorious queen.

When the nun awoke she was conscious that a heavenly fragrance pervaded the chamber where she slept. This sweet odour lasted for many days, and from it she drew great refreshment of mind and spirit.

Another vision was witnessed by the wife of Radulf de Hauville who was "a woman of reliable character and gentle breeding." She saw in sleep a host of angels ascending to Heaven, chanting at the same time hymns of ravishing melody. Two other bands of celestial spirits followed, bearing "as in a linen cloth" three youths of surpassing beauty. The one in the centre attracted her attention the most. Although young in appearance, yet his mien was of so dignified a character, that the beholder was forcibly struck with feelings of reverence and awe.

She inquired who this might be, and was told

that it was Master Gilbert of Sempringham, "who being dead was on his way to God." The lady awoke, and straightway told her husband of the vision she had seen. She took note of the day and later found it was that on which the saint had died.

The Sempringham chronicler records a third vision vouchsafed to one of the Gilbertine canons. A brother of the Order, lately dead, appeared to him in a dream. The canon questioned him on a variety of subjects, and finally asked him about their holy father—"where he was, and what he was doing, so that it might be made known to all." The vision answered that from the time he left the world, "he was immediately received into the choir of virgins."

After drawing out the subject to some length, the historian concludes as follows: "Now this vision does not seem to be at variance with the truth since we believe that a reward is meted to every man according to his works. . . . With justice, therefore, is he placed among the virgins, who virgin himself in mind and body . . . remained holy for ever, bestowing all his substance upon virgins, who also sacrificed his whole life to preserve in many souls the virtue of virginity."

When the news of Gilbert's death spread

abroad the faithful flocked to Sempringham, some that they might pray beside the body of the dead saint, others that they might gaze once more on the face they loved so well, and pay to him the last tokens of their love and respect. Gilbert was buried on Tuesday, February 7, three days after his death. A great concourse of people assembled to witness or to take part in the funeral service. Dignitaries of the Church were there, the rich and noble of the land, and representatives of many religious orders, but the most numerous in all that great concourse of people were the poor—the best beloved of Gilbert's flock. St Hugh of Lincoln, his bishop and friend was, it may be assumed, at Sempringham on that February morning to chant the requiem over the mortal remains of one whose life had been as a beacon-fire of faith in that vast diocese. St Hugh had been consecrated Bishop of Lincoln only three years before, in 1186, but had in that short time proved himself the defender and protector of religious in general and of Gilbert and his Order in particular.

Amongst the religious who were present at St Gilbert's funeral, mention must be made of the Cistercians, whose rule was the basis on which that of Sempringham had been built. They came from many an abbey, from Fountains, and

Rievaulx, and Louth Park. The black monks of St Benedict were there to do honour to the holy dead, as also were the canons regular of St Norbert, and the Austin canons from Bridlington and elsewhere.

Most conspicuous in all that gathering were Gilbert's own sons and daughters, the canons in their white linen copes, the nuns—a simple black-robed throng—the least pretentious in the imposing crowd, yet for whose sake all the rest existed.

Details of the great funeral function are wanting. No word has come down to us of the solemn Mass of Requiem, of the panegyric spoken, nor do we know the name of the preacher who uttered the last words of praise in presence of that great gathering. We who have followed Gilbert through a century of years know the import of that funeral oration. We can almost hear the exultant voice of the preacher as he interprets the thoughts of many minds, and expresses the feelings of many hearts; the admiration of pontiffs and prelates, the honour of the great and wise of the world, the veneration of strangers, the affection of kindred, and the love of the poor. The emotions that stirred in the hearts of the saint's own spiritual children no words could express.

And then the preacher recalled the labours and the achievements of a hundred years. The countryside had been made the home of peace and plenty; the country-folk, a sober, God-fearing people.

Under the influence of Gilbert's stimulating zeal, learning and letters had flourished, books had been written, manuscripts transcribed.

Up and down the land monasteries had arisen from which had gone forth, to the strong, incitements to industry, to the weak and suffering, healing and alms. And the crowning glory of this one life was that day in evidence before them—the great family which the founder had gathered and fostered. The fruits of his labours were in truth a hundredfold; his sons and daughters numbered two thousand two hundred souls.

The body of Gilbert of Sempringham was laid to rest in the Priory Church of Our Lady, and his tomb was placed in a central position at the end of the division wall. It was accessible from the canons' chapel as well as from that of the nuns. Gilbert's fame was widespread. Notices of his death are to be found in various contemporary chronicles. Amongst these may be mentioned that of William of Newburgh, who lived for some time at Bridlington in Yorkshire. He speaks in terms of the highest praise of Gilbert's life and virtues, and says that he

was unrivalled in the direction of religious women, "in this respect he holds the palm among all whom we have known." Roger of Hovedon, another chronicler of the time, also makes mention of the founder's death.

The news that his old and saintly friend had passed away reached King Henry when he was in Normandy fighting against his rebellious sons. He was overcome with grief, and in a great outburst of sorrow exclaimed, "Truly I knew that he had left the earth, for all these evils have come upon me because he is dead." It was only when those about him had pointed out that although he had lost an earthly friend, he had gained an advocate in Heaven, that the King was comforted.

Gilbert's tomb soon became a place of popular pilgrimage. From all parts the faithful flocked to do honour to the Saint of Sempringham, and to beg his intercession with God. Many miracles were wrought—the deaf heard, the dumb spoke, the lame walked.

Soon the question of his canonisation began to be discussed. Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, interested himself in the cause, and decided to accede to the oft-expressed wishes of the Gilbertines and to take steps towards obtaining the honours of the Church for the founder.

After obtaining the approval of the Holy See, he authorised a formal investigation of the miracles attributed to Gilbert and also an official examination of his writings. Three abbots were appointed to conduct the court of inquiry—the Augustinian abbot of Bourn, the Premonstratensian abbot of Croxton, and the Cistercian abbot of Swineshead. The abbeys were all in Lincolnshire.

The court was held at Sempringham. There the witnesses assembled, and there the writings of the founder, and his rule, were examined. During the later years of his life, Gilbert had sent many letters of counsel and advice to his brethren. He had also written a book, entitled "*De Constructione Monasteriorum.*" This work, which would have been of so much interest, is lost; its name only has been preserved by the canon chronicler who made much use of it in writing *St Gilbert's life*.

The investigations began on January 9, 1201, and were carried on in a series of continuous sittings until all evidence was attested and all points were proved. A statement of the miracles examined and the testimony of witnesses was taken down in writing by a monk-notary. The record has been preserved, and the reader cannot fail to be struck by the sincerity and truth

evident in all the depositions. It would be difficult to find more undeniable proof of St Gilbert's power with God, or of the simple piety and strong faith of our Catholic forefathers.

More than forty miracles were authenticated, the majority of which were worked after the saint's death. Detailed accounts are still available, but in many cases the length of the narratives precludes the possibility of reproduction. The witnesses, who seem to take life and shape as we read the words of the thirteenth-century historian, make a strange gathering—a mixed assembly of men and women, young and old, rich and poor, lay-folk and religious.

Brietina of Sempringham, witnessing, said that she had been deformed for seven years. During that time her infirmity had been so great that she had been unable either to walk or to stand erect. The only way in which she could move herself from place to place was by creeping like an infant along the ground. She was carried to St Gilbert's sepulchre, and there continued in prayer for some days.

She then tells how, as she slept beside the tomb, she had a vision. She saw St Gilbert surrounded by a great and wonderful light. In his hands he held many hosts, which presently

multiplied exceedingly. He came towards her and placed two of them in her mouth; then he blessed her and disappeared. She awoke and found herself cured, not only of her deformity, but also of a disease in the throat which had troubled her for many years.

“A certain priest, by name Richard, who was related to Robert, the procurator of Burton” (monastery), came to Sempringham to make an offering, for he had, by the intercession of St Gilbert, been miraculously cured of “a quinsy.” He gave evidence in proof of his statement, and said that the symptoms of his illness had been so alarming that death had seemed imminent. After a dream, in which he had seen the saint’s shrine, and even put his head within it, he awoke, and found himself completely cured. The swellings in his face and throat had disappeared. He notified his freedom from pain to one who slept in the room with him.

Many persons unable to visit Sempringham were healed by the devout application of a relic to the diseased limb or stricken body.

Two nuns of Chicksand were cured in this way. One at the point of death was restored to health; the other, Mabel de Stodefолde, recovered the use of a crippled foot after it had been wrapped

in a cloth which had lain on St Gilbert's breast when he breathed his last.

The daughter of Sir Alexander de Creissi was healed under similar conditions.

St Gilbert's clients often spent whole nights at his tomb. Usually they passed the time in prayer, but not infrequently, overcome by fatigue, they slept.

Sometimes the sufferer awoke sound and whole; occasionally, the cure was not effected until later.

Helwysa of Poynton, who had been deformed for three years, was carried to the priory church, where she was wrapped in a scapular of the saint and laid on or near the tomb. Next day she was taken home in the same crippled and deformed state. On the following night she was cured.

Matilda, the daughter of Ralph Rasyn of Poynton, after applying a relic and watching two nights in the church, "was cured of ulcers in both feet."

The report of the commission of inquiry closes with these words: "Many other miracles and notable things God did through the merits of his servant Gilbert, which have not been considered in this investigation, because they were not recorded, and were not properly testified to or examined by competent persons. Others, more-

over, were only known after this discussion, hence they are not contained in this account."

The abbots having satisfied themselves by sworn inquisition as to the truth of the miracles, closed the sessions, and prepared to send their evidence to Rome.

CHAPTER XVI

CANONISATION

POPE INNOCENT III. at this time occupied the chair of St Peter. His is one of the most illustrious of the many noble names which grace the long list of Sovereign Pontiffs.

In the light of later events the record reads strangely that King John piously visited Gilbert's tomb and afterwards wrote to the Pope urging his canonisation.

However, at the time he was still playing the part of a dutiful son of the Church. The prelates who added their petitions to those of the King were the Bishops of London, Norwich, Bangor, and Ely. The Dean and Chapter of Lincoln wrote to the same effect; but the most important of all the petitionary documents was that drawn up and sealed by the three abbots who had held the court of inquisition. Gilbert's own children added their supplications to the rest, and if their plea was the least influential, it was certainly the most eloquent and earnest.

They begged the Pope "to number Gilbert among the saints, to set his light upon a candlestick, to dig up this precious pearl from under the muddy soil where it lies."

When all the documents were ready, sealed and certified, they were confided to the care of two canons, who were commissioned to carry them to Rome for the inspection and approbation of the Curia, the ecclesiastical court of the Holy See. Long journeys were at that time undertakings of time and moment. The importance attached to this one in particular is emphasised by the care with which the chronicler narrates all details. It was the summer season, and the weather was hot and trying. The dangers of the road were many, and the inconveniences great. Perils from robbers threatened throughout the long land journey, dangers which the Gilbertine canons happily eluded, as they took care later to make known. They also considered themselves fortunate in escaping, in spite of the unhealthy weather, the fatal pestilence of the Campagna.

Arrived at length at their destination, they presented themselves to the Pope, and were most kindly received by him. Having read and maturely weighed the contents of the letters, and conversed with them respecting their founder and his Order, and having invoked the aid of

God in prayer, he sent them back to England, with letters for the Archbishop and others.

The Pope ordered that the inquisition touching Gilbert's life and virtues should be proceeded with, and further enjoined that a general fast of three days should be observed in all the Gilbertine houses. The second court of inquiry met on September 26, 1201. The Archbishop arranged that the prescribed fast should be kept on that day, and on the two succeeding. The judicial meetings were presided over by Archbishop Hubert himself, assisted by the Bishops of Ely, Bath, and Bangor. There were also present the Abbots of Bury and Bourn.

The Master of Sempringham, Gilbert's disciple and successor, worked arduously to further the cause of his beloved Master's canonisation.

St Mary's Priory Church was crowded with pilgrims flocking to the tomb of the saint, and the priory offered hospitality to all clients—the stricken and the healed. Master Roger spared neither the time of the brethren nor the money of the Order, in bringing to the inquisition those who claimed miraculous favours through the intercession of Gilbert. Some account of these miracles has already been given. The treatise from which they are taken includes all miracles authenticated. Hence no distinction has been

made between those examined at the earlier investigation, and those which came to light later on.

At this second inquiry many miracles were attested which had been unknown before, the happy consequence, no doubt, of Roger's zeal and care.

One night, having retired to rest overcome by anxiety and fatigue, he had a most beautiful dream, in which his beloved father appeared to him as a heavenly vision, resplendent with glory and surrounded with light. Gilbert smiled upon his son, and said to him gently, "Why art thou careful about seeking many miracles? Be not so, for it is not needful." Gladdened and consoled by this vision, Roger awoke. All anxiety concerning the cause left him, for he felt that it "would be easily obtained." The court of inquiry being ended, the miracles proved, and all points of doubt settled, the bishops confirmed the decision of the earlier court, and decreed that Gilbert's virtues were of such an eminent degree as to permit them formally to solicit the Holy See for his canonisation. It was arranged that five Gilbertine canons should proceed to Rome, and that they should be accompanied by six men chosen out of the many miraculously cured at Gilbert's tomb. To this deputation the

Archbishop entrusted the sealed documentary evidence drawn up by the inquisitors. He also wrote himself to the Pope, bearing further testimony to the saint's virtues, saying that "his abstinence was wonderful, his chastity conspicuous, his prayers watchful and devout, his care for his flock eager and discreet. Meditation filled up his leisure hours, action and contemplation alternating with each other like the angels ascending and descending Jacob's ladder. An idle word seldom escaped his lips." No more striking epitome of a holy life could be desired than that contained in these words. There is little doubt that this verdict had later on its effect and led the Pope to receive the deputies with especial favour, and to use his personal influence for the speedy realisation of their desires.

The little party travelled this time in the winter, and arrived safely at their destination. The journey was not accomplished without danger; often, as before, their safety was threatened by robbers, but under the protection of Heaven they escaped all perils. They were consoled on their way by visions of Gilbert, whom they frequently invoked. He appeared to them in their dreams, and filled their hearts with joy and consolation. They reached Rome on the

last day of the year 1201. The Pope, however, had left Rome for Anagni, where they followed him, and soon succeeded in obtaining an audience. Innocent received them with fatherly kindness and interest on January 2. They delivered to him their messages from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and their precious documents. These the Pope assured them would be laid with as little delay as possible before the Curia. A few days later the cardinals met, and proceeded at once with the Gilbertine case. The written evidence of the saint's life and miracles impressed them so strongly that they declared the cause won before the whole of the evidence had been submitted. They were struck with admiration and wonder at the sanctity of Gilbert's life, and declared that the matter presented for consideration was more than sufficient to warrant his canonisation. The whole case was then laid before the Holy Father, who reserved his judgment until by prayer and meditation he should have learnt the Divine Will.

On the night of January 9, whilst still in a state of uncertainty, the Pope had a strange dream. This vision, with its explanation, is described at length by the Sempringham biographer. It has been considered more in

keeping with the purpose of the present work to give the complete account in an appendix rather than to reproduce it here. It will be sufficient to say that a certain holy man, being chosen as interpreter, explained the dream to mean that "the bidding of the Lord" required the pontiff, without further delay, to place the name of Gilbert in the catalogue of the saints.

When all formalities prescribed by the Church on such occasions had been gone through, the Holy Father ordered preparations to be made for the great ceremony of canonisation. On January 11 this took place in presence of an immense congregation, including the little band from Sempringham. How great must have been their joy at this happy and speedy termination of their mission! How earnestly, too, must they, the first to call their father by his God-given title, have invoked him by the sweet name of saint!

They hurried home, too happy to be afraid of perils by land or sea, and were soon once more in England. Probably they then broke up into two parties, one of which made its way to Canterbury to place the Pope's letter and decree in the hands of Archbishop Hubert, the other to carry the glad tidings to Sempringham. The joy of that home-coming can be imagined, not

described. Across country from Sempringham to Lincoln, upwards to Yorkshire, and eastwards down many a lonely and swampy roadway, the couriers hurried with the great news, and in each Gilbertine house, from Malton in the north to Chicksand in Bedfordshire, there was rejoicing and content indescribable.

The Archbishop lost no time in promulgating the Pope's decree. He wrote letters to all the bishops, commanding them to keep the feast of St Gilbert on February 4. He also made known to them that the solemn ceremony of the translation of the relics of the saint would take place on the Sunday after the feast of St James. They were all invited to be present at that ceremony, and were requested to make known to their respective flocks that the founder of the Order of Sempringham had been raised to the dignity of a canonised saint, and that all the faithful were free to attend at the forthcoming function. In accordance with these recommendations, the archdeacons in each diocese sent out the necessary letters of instruction.

On October 13 the translation took place. People of all sorts and conditions were at Sempringham, as on the day of the saint's funeral twelve years before, but the tone of the assembly was widely different. Now joy reigned

supreme; personal sorrow was lost in general exultation. The body of St Gilbert was taken from the tomb in the Priory Church, placed on the shoulders of four of England's greatest nobles, and carried to the place of honour prepared for it.

The Archbishop of Canterbury granted an indulgence of forty days to all who should visit and devoutly pray at the shrine of St Gilbert, and the bishops present enriched his tomb with further indulgences. Other spiritual privileges were proclaimed for all who should make this shrine a place of pilgrimage and prayer—to such was given a share in all the prayers and blessings of those who “served in the churches of Sempringham, and in the Church of Canterbury for ever.”

The chronicler of Sempringham, so often quoted in these pages, wrote the story of St Gilbert's life at the request of Master Roger, and dedicated it to Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, who had proved himself so devoted a client of St Gilbert, and patron of his Order. Hubert died some years later, in May 1205.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GILBERTINES AT CAMBRIDGE AND STAMFORD

ALTHOUGH the Gilbertines never developed into a teaching order, it is clear from the founder's life that he set great store upon learning as a means both to personal holiness and to the spread of Christ's kingdom in the world. When St Gilbert first conceived the plan of perfecting his Order by the affiliation of priests, he stated his ideas as to the qualifications necessary for reception, and specially emphasised his desire that they should be "learned." A great portion of their daily life was, according to his rule, spent in increasing and perfecting their knowledge.

St Gilbert would not allow his clerics to undertake the education of youth, except of such as were seeking admission to the Order, lest the time which they would be obliged to give to the work should interfere with their care of the nuns. Before he founded his Order of contemplatives, he was fully convinced that the work of education was not that destined by God for them. It

is possible that the canons, when living in priories apart from the nuns, may have engaged in the work of teaching, but there is no proof that such was the case.

In 1223 Pope Honorius III. issued a mandate prohibiting the nuns of Sempringham from taking into their convents any young girls for education except such as wished to enter the Order. From this it seems certain that they had already either received some pupils, or were contemplating opening schools. There is no sign to show whence the impulse came which led to the Pope's "inhibition."

Towards the end of the century a great revival of learning took place amongst the religious orders, beginning probably with the Benedictines, who were the first to establish a connection with the universities. The Gilbertines soon followed their example. That they solicited the permission and help of the Pope is clear, for on June 9, 1290, Nicholas IV. issued an order to the Archdeacon of Stow bidding him "to grant the place held by the Friars of Penitence of Jesus Christ, which they are about to leave, to the Master and brethren of Sempringham, who often send members of their Order to study at the Castle of Cambridge and need a house there, in which they intend to have a canonry, a fair price

being paid for the said place, which is to be deposited in safety for the Holy Land subsidy, or some other purpose as pleases the Pope." A few months later a licence was granted to the Prior and brethren of Sempringham, "to have within their house a discreet and learned doctor of theology, to teach those of the brethren who desire to learn that science." This was, apparently, the preparatory step to taking up residence at Cambridge, for a priory was established there a few months afterwards. The white canons from Sempringham settled at the old chapel of St Edmund, King and martyr, in the year 1291, which property "they received from B, son of Walter."

The Gilbertines enjoyed at Cambridge a reputation for learning, industry, and regularity. "The canons of Sempringham," wrote the Augustinian chronicler of Barnwell Priory, "were diligent in hearing lectures and disputations, and held lectures and disputations at their own hall by the Chapel of St Edmund." All the Sempringham houses contributed to the support of the priory at Cambridge, which evidently had no means of self-support. The richer priories, such as Sempringham, Chicksand, and Bullington, gave fifteen shillings a year, whilst the small house at Mirmaud contributed four shillings.

One inmate, at least, of the Cambridge house, left his mark in history. This was Robert Mannyng of Brunne, who came from Bourn, near Sempringham. As it has not been definitely stated that he was in Holy Orders, and, as he evinces in his writings a great awe of the priesthood, some have suggested that he was possibly only a lay-brother. This supposition is highly improbable, as it would be most unlikely that the Order would choose a lay-brother to enjoy the coveted privilege of study at Cambridge. Robert resided in the Priory of Sempringham, and in that of Sixhills, and it is probable that he was sent from the former place to the University. He wrote "in simple speech for unlearned men" his chronicle, "The Story of England." He told how at Cambridge he knew Robert Bruce and his brothers, Thomas and Alexander, and states that the last named was the best artist of his day. "He was present at the feast which Robert made, perhaps at his inception for his degree." Little else is known of Robert Mannyng's life, except that besides being well educated, he was keenly observant, and of a cheerful, kindly disposition. The work by which he is chiefly remembered is entitled "Handlyng Synne." This was not an entirely original work, but rather an English version of a book entitled "Manuel des Péchés,"

written in the time of Edward I. It was a satire on the failings of men and women of all classes of society.

The purpose of the book was to instruct the people in a pleasant way by means of moral anecdotes. The work is of great importance as being one of the best landmarks in the transition of the language from the early to the later Middle English. Robert unfolds the purpose of his book in the preface :

“For lewdē men y vndyrtoke
On englyssh tunge to make thys boke.
For many ben of swyche manere,
That talys and rymys wyl blethly here.
Yu gamys and festys; and at the ale,
Love men to lestene trotēuale
That may falle ofte to vylanye
To dedly synne or other folye.”

He then proceeds to say that he dedicates the work to all Christian men under the sun, to those of Brunne in particular, and also to

“The felaushipe of Symprynhame.”

He wrote deliberately in English in order to reach the common people, to give them “the means for to haf solace and gamen, in felauship when tha sit samen” (together). Robert also made a new version of Wace’s “Brut d’Angleterre.”

In 1292 the Gilbertines established themselves at Stamford, a town which had risen into eminence as an educational centre. The Carmelites had

opened schools there, and carried them on with great success. Its educational status had been further increased by "an influx of scholars from Northampton" about the year 1265. These students had left Oxford and Cambridge in consequence of "the town and gown rows" at the universities, and had congregated at Northampton, where for a time it seemed probable that a new university might be founded. Thomas Fuller, the author of a *Church History of Britain*, commends their choice of "so convenient a place, where the air is clear, and not over-sharp; the earth fruitful, yet not over-dirty; water plentiful, yet far from any fennish annoyance; and wood conveniently sufficient in that age. But the main is, Northampton is near the centre of England, so that all travellers coming thither from the remotest parts of the land may be said to meet by the town in the midst of their journey."

However, the Oxford scholars had incurred the displeasure of Henry III. by stoutly defending the town against him, and were consequently expelled from Northampton. They fled to Stamford, where many of them established themselves, and where colleges and schools became numerous. Strenuous efforts were made to found a university there, but without permanent success.

In 1292 Robert Luterel, Rector of Irnham, near

Stamford, gave the manor in the parish of St Peter, Stamford, to the Priory of Sempringham, "desirous to increase the numbers of the convent, and that 'it might ever have scholars at Stamford studying divinity and philosophy.'" He stipulated that the Master should provide a chaplain to minister to the spiritual needs of the scholars in the chantry of Our Lady at the Manor. The foundation became known as Sempringham Hall. For many years the names of "Peterborough Halle, Sempringham Halle, and Vauldier" remained to remind the world of the old monastic traditions of Stamford.

The Gilbertines were responsible for the "Annals of Sempringham," a brief record of events, chiefly historical, down to 1326; from the year 1310 to 1326 they are fuller and more detailed. The annals appear to be a continuation of the history of "*Le Livère de Reis de Engleterre*," written by Peter of Ickham, who may possibly have been a Gilbertine canon. The book owes its title to the fact that the annals were written at Sempringham. Extracts from these "annals" will be given in a succeeding chapter, from which their historical and literary value may be estimated.

There is no account extant of the later history of Sempringham Hall at Stamford; as no mention

is made of it at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries it had undoubtedly been abandoned before the reign of Henry VIII.

Official statements of the date of the actual suppression of St Edmund's, Cambridge, are wanting; but from contemporary documents it is evident that the dissolution took place in the year 1538.

CHAPTER XVIII

LATER HISTORY OF THE ORDER OF SEMPRINGHAM

THE story of St Gilbert's Order, from the time of his death until the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII., is traced faintly yet clearly on the pages of history. It tells of a brief period of prosperity, of a long and weary struggle with debt and hardship, a struggle which continued with little alleviation until the great spoliation which took place for the Gilbertines in 1538-9.

Although they never spread beyond England, yet, for many years, they held property in Scotland, and probably also at one time they owned land in Ireland.

When Master Roger, Gilbert's immediate successor, ruled the Order, Walter Fitz-Allan, the Seneschal of Scotland, offered to found a house north of the Tweed. The offer was not accepted. Possibly the Master considered it inadvisable to make a foundation so far from any other house of the Order.

The words of Fitz-Allan's proposal have been

preserved, and are worth quoting. He writes :
“ Inspired by divine instinct to advance from virtue to virtue, because I have understood that there is no zeal against zeal for souls, for my own safety, for that of my ancestors and successors, for the increase of religion, and the saving of souls, I have proposed to found a house of your Order in the parts of Scotland at Newton-upon-Ayr, at my own expense.”

Although the Gilbertines thought it inadvisable to build a priory in Scotland, they nevertheless accepted the endowment, and leased it to the Abbot and Monastery of Paisley for a rent of forty marks a year, to be paid to the Priors of Malton and St Andrews by York, at the Premonstratensian Abbey of Dryburgh on the Tweed.

This arrangement was not always attended with satisfactory results. In the year 1327, “ the payment of forty marks by the monastery of Paisley had ceased for fourteen years by reason of the Scotch wars.” It will be shown later how ill the Order could, at that time, afford to lose this money.

The foundation in Ireland is ascribed to an earlier date, but the proofs of its actual establishment are not important or conclusive.

The “ *Monasticon Hibernicum* ” asserts that

“in the year 1218, the family of Lacie erected a monastery here (in Ballimore, Westmeath) in honour of the Virgin Mary, for Gilbertines, which Order consisted of canons of the Premonstratensian Order, and nuns following the rule of St Benedict.”

This description is strangely at variance with accepted facts, but the historian who is unacquainted with the proofs on which it is based cannot estimate its worth. Perhaps the truth that St Gilbert borrowed from St Norbert's rule when drawing up his own may account for some confusion, and the surmise that the Gilbertines disposed of their property in Westmeath to the Premonstratensians may be held responsible for the rest.

The de Lacy family were benefactors to the Order, and it is quite likely that they offered land and endowment in Ireland for a foundation. Roger de Lacy made substantial gifts to Haverholme, and at Newstead his memory, or that of one bearing his name, was long honoured by a distribution of bread to the poor on the anniversary of his death.

From the above it will be seen that the whole subject of the Irish monastery is shrouded in obscurity. If founded at all, it was short-lived.

During the last two hundred years of its exis-

tence the Order was heavily oppressed by the burden of debt. Its members were constantly harassed by creditors, and constantly trying to escape from the trammels in which their money difficulties held them.

Official documents still extant bear witness to the poverty of the Gilbertines. They tell of privileges to help them to live, grants of money or land, exemptions from taxes and tolls, and of petitions by priors or priories for release from debts owing to the Crown, and so on.

During the first part of the century following St Gilbert's death prosperity reigned. In the time of Edward I. many subjects were admitted to the Order. These included the sons and daughters of wealthy lords and gentlemen who brought with them rich gifts and powerful patronage. The Priories were enlarged to house the growing family, and new foundations made.

Edward I. and his two immediate successors granted many favours to the Gilbertines. In 1277 the King forbade anyone to take forcible possession of grain or provisions belonging to the Order or Master of Sempringham. Other protections of a like nature were repeated from time to time. In the year 1316 there was great scarcity in the land, and provisions of all sorts were conveyed with difficulty from one place to

another. The half-starved and hungry populace laid hands upon all eatables which came in their way. The inmates of Bullington Priory were sore pressed for food, and unless a stock of provisions could be safely laid in to last beyond the winter, they were likely to die of starvation. The prior applied to the King for protection to enable him to convey safely from the town of Leicester to Bullington certain "victuals and corn" which were necessary for the sustenance of the canons and nuns and other persons dwelling there. The petition was granted.

The loss of popularity which befell the Gilbertines may be traced—amongst other causes—to a feeling of envy with which they came to be regarded in consequence of the favour shown to them by rulers in Church and State. These privileges made them independent in temporal matters of all save the King, and in spiritual of all superiors outside their Order, except the Pope. They incurred the ill-will of the country people because they enjoyed advantages denied to them; for example, the privilege of "free warren," which gave them liberty to hunt or snare birds and rabbits in their fields and woods. They were also exempt from payment of taxes, a burden under which our ancestors groaned as continuously as their descendants of to-day.

Henry II. had freed the Order of Sempringham "from all secular exactions and earthly service" and from all "gelds and taxes." John extended and renewed his father's grants, and succeeding sovereigns did the same.

The holy founder had not been dead many years before the smouldering discontent of the people flamed up into direct and open opposition. They complained that when they had any grievance against the Gilbertine canons, redress was impossible, as the protection of the King made any appeal against them useless. The protection of the Pope also led to strained relations with the secular clergy. The exemption from the payment of tithes, wherever they held and cultivated land at their own expense, was a grievance, and reasonably so, with the clergy to whom tithes were due. The Gilbertines were also exempt from the "tithes of mills" and "tithes of the young of animals," called in Yorkshire the tithe of St John of Beverley, in Lincolnshire the tithe of "Mariencorn." Clearly these privileges were to the disadvantage of the parish priests, who probably stood in greater need of money than the inmates of monasteries, and could scarcely tend to the strengthening of the bond of union between the clergy, secular and regular.

Another licence allowed to the Order was that of "free burial." This gave them freedom to receive into their churches or cemeteries the bodies of secular persons. In the Middle Ages great store was set upon conventual burial on account of the prayers thus ensured to the soul of the deceased. Founders and benefactors of monasteries often stipulated in their wills that they should be buried in the church which they had built. An instance of such a request is that of Humphrey, the founder of Alvingham Priory. He wrote: "The same convent has received my wife Avice and me into its spiritual fraternity, and when our last day has closed it will receive us into its burial-ground in charity, and perform for us the full service as for a brother or a sister of the house." Quotations of the same kind might be multiplied, but one more will suffice to emphasise the point. In 1396 John de Beaumont, lord of Folkingham, left "to Sempringham Priory the little cross made of our Lord's cross, and my body to be buried in Sempringham Church, near the body of my most honoured lord, my father, whom God assoile."

A great favour enjoyed by the Order was that of freedom from extreme spiritual penalties when the kingdom was under an interdict. At such times the Gilbertines were allowed to hold their

usual services, but in low voices, without ringing of bells, and with closed doors. This was permitted on condition that they excluded all persons who were excommunicated or under the interdict. Exemption from episcopal visitation was early granted, and the privilege renewed by succeeding pontiffs.

The thoughtful reader will realise that these favours carried with them seeds which in the natural order were sure to bear poisonous fruit. As already stated, the people resented the freedom from common burdens enjoyed by the inmates of the priories, and felt their own taxation heavier as a consequence of the privilege of quittance allowed to the religious. However, the taxes eventually paid by the Order in recognition of royal favours were far more burdensome than any they could have been called upon to pay in the ordinary way. When the King was in need of money or its equivalent he turned to the Order of Sempringham, and sent to the Master or to some particular prior a statement of his need, with either a direct demand for money, or a request which virtually amounted to the same thing. In 1310 Edward II. applied to the Gilbertines for help towards defraying the expenses of his Scotch expedition. He asked "by way of loan" for money to provide

“victuals” for the soldiers, and hoped the Master of Sempringham would prove his loyalty by sending the desired help as speedily as possible. Three years later the same sovereign asked for a loan of three thousand marks, and in March, 1315, demanded £2000. In each case the money was wanted for war expenses. The whole of the revenue of the Order hardly exceeded £3000, yet the Gilbertines dared not refuse the King’s command.

We read in the annals of Sempringham that in the year 1322 the King, Edward II., requested the Master to send as many foot soldiers as he could to the muster at Coventry. From the same source we have an account of the rising. The King was victorious at Boroughbridge. In the Parliament which met at York two months later, it was stated that “Margaret, Countess of Cornwall, wife of Hugh de Audley, and niece of the King, was judged to continue in guard at Sempringham among the nuns, where she arrived on 16th May.” The lady’s husband had apparently either fallen in battle, or been executed as a rebel, and the King found for her a convenient and safe lodging in the priory.

Two years later another lady was sent to Sempringham under circumstances somewhat similar. To quote again from the *Annals*:

“Joan, the daughter of Sir Roger de Mortimer of Wigmor, who escaped out of the Tower of London, was sent to Sempringham by the King, whither she came on Whitsun Eve, the second day of June.” The opinions of the persons chiefly concerned in these transactions may be safely conjectured. Probably the ladies were as loath to accept the monastic lodgings as the nuns were to offer it, but neither the one party nor the other had any choice in the matter. Edward I. had made a precedent for this sort of tax upon the religious houses when in 1283 he had sent the infant daughters of Llewellyn and David, Princes of Wales, to be brought up with the Gilbertines. His letter to the Prior and Prioress of Alvingham on the subject is interesting. He asks them to take the children, to bring them up, and then to admit them to their habit and Order, “having,” the King wrote, “the Lord before our eyes, pitying their age and sex, and that the innocent and unwitting may not seem to atone for the iniquity and ill-doing of the wicked, and contemplating especially the life of your Order,” etc. The children’s fate was thus sealed, and was happier in the event than would possibly have been the case if they had been brought up at court. Wencilian, the daughter of Llewellyn, became a nun at Sempringham,

and her cousin Gladaus a nun at Sixhills. The former died in 1337, having lived in the Order for fifty-four years. The King acknowledged the claim of these princesses upon him, and from time to time issued mandates to ensure their well-being. He also allowed the Priory of Sempringham to acquire certain lands "in mortmain" because he had burdened it with the care of Wencilian. The son and grandson of Edward I. continued to interest themselves in these Welsh princesses. In the year 1327 Edward III. stayed some days at Sempringham, and then granted Wencilian a yearly pension of twenty pounds for life, a liberal allowance in those times and circumstances.

The story of Wencilian is told by the chronicler, Peter of Langtoft:

" Now is Leulyn forsuorn and his hede of smyten
 His heritage is lorn fro his heyres ye wyten
 More than a yere beforn that he lauht this schame,
 A douhter was him born, Wencilian hir name.
 In her credille ying tille Ingland scho cam,
 Thorgh conseile of the Kyng was brouht to
 Sempyngham
 And there was ssho enne four and fifty yere,
 Norised with Wynne, nunne and seculere.
 Now haf we new tateles, dede is Wencilian
 Leulyn douhter of Wales that on Ingland ran."

The rhyme also tells of the death of Gladaus, "her cosyn," who "died a yere beforn."

Margery, daughter of Robert Bruce, was placed in Watton Priory in 1305, in accordance with the King's command, and for her maintenance only threepence a day was allowed, with an addition of one mark yearly "for her robe as long as she remained there." A like amount was paid for one "Christina, wife of the late Christopher de Seton, enemy and rebel, dwelling at Sixhills."

It was a custom of the sovereigns of England during the Middle Ages to travel about the country with much state, attended by a long retinue of nobles and gentry, and with a great following of servants. The court was always accompanied by a band of purveyors, whose business it was to find food for the royal table. These officials rendered the King's coming an event dreaded and detested by the country people. They took without excuse or scruple everything which came to hand. Poverty was no guarantee against their inroads. Horses were unyoked from plough or waggon and pressed into the royal service; husbandmen were coerced to unwilling labour; and all this according to the whims and needs of the officers of the King. Food in any and every shape or form was seized and carried off to the court kitchen, and little or no remuneration was made to those robbed, neither to

the lord nor to the peasant. The Archbishop of Canterbury in the time of Edward III. wrote the King a severe letter on the subject. He told him that the poor trembled at his approach, that they then either hid or ate their cocks and hens, knowing that when the King came they would be robbed of them; he added that for himself he "shook all over with fear when he heard the first horn proclaim the King's arrival at his gate."

The Gilbertine priories, with their wide-spreading pasture lands, provided ample plunder for the purveyors, and they could ill spare food, either flesh or fruit, for the larders were scantily provided, and the mouths many to feed. The destitution left after one of these passages of the King was not more complete in the poor herdsman's hut than in the monastery, where debts multiplied, and the possibility of freedom grew more remote.

The custom of sending distinguished prisoners or pensioners of the King into religious houses answered so well, that it became customary for royal personages to relegate to them also any old servants or retainers whom they wished to see comfortably settled and provided for in old age or infirmity. The imposition seems so audacious to modern notions that it is hard to realise how the burden was borne patiently, especially as

there is so little mention of payments made in recognition of hospitality given.

In 1320 Edward II. sent Agnes Capoun to Chicksand to be cared for and tended because her father had "served him." In the same year he sent to St Catherine's, outside Lincoln, one "Christina de Hauville, whose husband and three sons were slain by the Scotch rebels, and her lands and goods totally destroyed and wasted by them, until she be able to live of her own again." The Priory of St Catherine's was also hampered by another alien inmate, a penitent Templar, sent by the Bishop of the diocese. However, in this case remuneration was made, fourpence a day being paid as pension for him to the convent. It will be remembered that the prior of Holland Brigge undertook, at the foundation, to keep in repair thirty bridges situated in the vicinity of the priory. After a time, when revenues decreased, this burden became intolerable, and the bridges were allowed to fall to ruin. The people were ignorant, and made many complaints against the prior for his remissness in keeping to the contract. He always pleaded poverty as his excuse, and stated that Godwin of Lincoln, the founder, had stipulated that the Gilbertines were to keep the bridges repaired with any money left over after

their daily needs had been satisfied. The revenues no longer provided for necessities, and as the foundation was in a state of extreme poverty, the prior held himself free from all responsibility touching the bridges. The people, however, considered him still bound, the more so as their convenience was much hindered through want of safe passages across the river. They therefore kept very active their grievance against the canons. On one occasion the case was carried to Parliament, which was held in York, and the prior was cited to appear to answer the old charge. He made the same defence and appeal as before. So notorious was this dispute that on several occasions the King came to the rescue of the Order, and allowed them to take tolls from passengers crossing the bridges. Even this seems to have been insufficient, for we find that eventually the prior received a royal mandate authorising him to beg for seven years throughout England for money to keep the thirty unfortunate bridges in proper repair. After this no more is heard of the matter. Possibly the greater troubles which befell the Order in the following century turned men's minds to graver things than the repair of bridges in the fen district.

From the fourteenth century to the dissolution

the struggle with debt became more harassing. The causes are not far to seek. The chief source of revenue had up to this time been from the wool trade. This industry steadily declined, and with it the fortunes of the Order of Sempringham. The reputation of being rich and successful wool merchants had its drawbacks, as the Gilbertines found to their cost as early as 1193, when all the wool of the year was seized to pay King Richard's ransom.

The annals of Sempringham tell of a "great murrain of cattle" in 1319, and also of "a general earthquake with great noise and sound." In 1349 came the terrible pestilence of the Black Death, which swept away the inhabitants of the priories in great numbers. Probably more than half the Order died at this time. The pestilence brought other evils in its train, a mortality amongst the cattle being one of the most serious. They died in hundreds, sheep in thousands. The harvest rotted in the fields for lack of labourers to gather it in.

The Gilbertine priories suffered much loss. They were scattered over the desolate fens where in times of plenty living was hard enough—in times of famine an impossibility. When the dreaded pestilence had spent its fury and claimed its victims, the survivors gathered together their

scattered forces and contemplated the possibilities of future living. The prospect was sad in the extreme, but with dogged energy and with the strength husbanded in prayer, they took up the burden of daily life, and, out of the remnants left by death, reorganised the Order on its old footing. The task was difficult. The most valuable spiritual guides were gone; the revenues, scanty before the plague, were now almost exhausted, and new procurators had to learn by experience how to make a slender and uncertain income cover the expenses of the priories. The Black Death had carried off most of the lay-brothers. The problem of how to find labourers to gather in the harvest when money was scarce and hired labour available only for a high wage had to be solved. By dint of courage and perseverance the Gilbertines fought their way back to some of their former efficiency, but the Order never actually regained the vigour of its youth.

In the reign of Henry IV. the Prior of Malton, with his canons and tenantry, allied themselves with the party of Archbishop Scrope of York in a rising against the King's forces. The rebellion was headed by the Duke of Northumberland, and was in favour of Edmund Mortimer, the rightful heir to the throne. The rising was suppressed,

and the leaders punished. The penalty paid by the Gilbertines for their part in the affair was probably that of fine or forfeiture of property.

The canons were drawn principally from the land-owning class, and possessed the natural tendencies of their kind. Unfortunately, the fighting spirit of the soldier of the world often lived on beneath the armour of the soldier of Christ. They frequently became embroiled in quarrels concerning land or landed rights with neighbouring knights and squires, and the history of these quarrels and their issues is not edifying reading. The story of cattle-lifting and raids upon property reads more like a chapter from Scottish Border history than the record of contests in which religious were concerned. In extenuation of the part taken by the Gilbertine canons in these wrangles, two excuses may be offered: first that the spirit of the times was warlike, and secondly, the argument of the Gilbertines that as their possessions were held in trust for God, so much the more were they bound to defend them with life and limb. The vigour with which they held their lands may have saved them from petty persecutors, but in the long run it profited the Order little. Families of high rank became in many instances alienated from

them, and the day was fast approaching when they would need all the friends they could muster.

During the early days of the reign of Henry VI. fortune again, for a brief space, smiled upon the Order of Sempringham. The King was gentle and pious, more fitted by nature for the cloister than for the throne. He renewed the privileges previously granted to the Order, which in the troubled times through which it had passed had either been discontinued or disallowed. He declared that the Gilbertines were exempt from all "subsidies and tallages," and further stated that the Order was free from "any payments of tenths or fifteenths made by the whole body of clergy, or of the provinces of Canterbury and York separately."

The name of Nicholas Resby, who was Master of Sempringham in 1440, stands out conspicuously during these years, which were either shrouded in darkness or lit up by fitful rays of the smile of fortune. During his time a life of St Gilbert was written by one John Capgrave, an Austin friar of Lynn. He and Nicholas had been friends at Cambridge, and when the Augustinian wrote the life of St Gilbert he presented the fruit of his labour to him who held the saint's office and place in the Order. Unhappily the

book is lost, and we know little of it save its name and author.

This brief period of peace and partial prosperity was soon lost in the calamities attending the Wars of the Roses. The rival armies swept the country with consequences almost as disastrous to the inhabitants as the plague itself. A contemporary chronicler has left a graphic account of the havoc wrought: "Like locusts do they come and devour the fields, a treacherous people ready for rapine with the hundred-handed grasp of Briareus." The Lancastrians made themselves especially obnoxious by their deeds of robbery and plunder.

The name of Edward IV. is the last on the list of royal benefactors to Sempringham. He granted pardon of debts at Sixhills and at Newstead-on-Ancholme, in consideration of the great poverty of the Order. The plight of the Gilbertines at this time was a sorry one. Land had decreased in value, and conditions had become so unfavourable that they were quite unable to pay their debts. And so the years sped by. The inmates of the priories little dreamt as they struggled on that the days of their Order were numbered, and that a great crisis was impending.

The years immediately preceding the final

catastrophe were unmarked by any event of importance. What, it may be asked, was the condition of spiritual life amongst the Gilbertines during the vicissitudes through which they had passed? Who shall say? The written history of the Order as we have it is an account of external happenings. It does not speak of the fervour with which St Gilbert's spirit was kept alive, nor of the fidelity with which the rule was observed. The religious life is an interior life, and calls for no record. Whilst the canons fought for the rights of their Order, the nuns lived their quiet life of contemplation and prayer, very similar in many respects to that which is led to-day in cloistered orders, and which St Gilbert himself taught the first "seven maidens" for whom he built a refuge from the world, against the wall of St Andrew's Church at Sempringham.

The history of the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. has been written in late years, by historians of weight and worth, and the old-fashioned forgeries propagated by the so-called reformers and their agents have been refuted to the satisfaction of all impartial critics.

The story of the Gilbertines, however, would be incomplete were the fact to be suppressed, that the last Master of the Order, Robert Holgate,

was a renegade. Business connected with one of the priories took him to London. There he met Cromwell, with whom he became intimate, and was soon appointed one of the King's chaplains. This happened before he was made Master. Probably he was nominated to the position by the King at the instigation of Cromwell, and not elected by the brethren in the usual way.

Holgate became the satellite of his chief, and a ready tool in his hands. Even before the dissolution he openly threw off every appearance of fidelity to the Church, and of loyalty to his Order.

Perchance the gold of Henry lured him astray, as the gold of the high priests tempted to destruction one who had been trained in a higher school than that of Sempringham. If there was a Judas amongst the twelve chosen by the Great Master, what wonder that a traitor's name tarnishes the last page of the history of the Order of Sempringham?

The Gilbertines possessed no houses outside England, so that when the last priories fell into the King's hands, the only purely English monastic Order which had existed since 1131 became totally extinct.

Before closing this chapter it were well, perhaps, in deference to the practical bent of

twentieth-century thought, to touch upon the law of cause and consequence. There is a tendency in these days to estimate the success of work by the gross results obtained. This is quite in opposition to the spiritual sense.

Critics have questioned the worth of St Gilbert's Order, because it ceased to exist in the sixteenth century, and because one at least of its members was unfaithful. Various causes other than the most obvious—the want of houses abroad—might be enumerated to account for the extinction of the Order.

One only will be mentioned here, the system of dual monasteries which was peculiar to the Middle Ages. Later, different religious ideals, more suited to the modern mind, and more fitted to meet changed conditions of society, arose.

The history of the Church shows that God raises up, from time to time, holy persons whose vocation is to combat certain evils or to meet certain needs. The methods they employ and the results they achieve are influenced and governed by circumstances of time and place. Instruments used by the workman of one age would not meet the requirements of his descendants in the next.

With God all things are possible. He can, when and how it pleases Him, bring forth from

a source apparently sterile a new spiritual growth, even as green stem and leaf may spring from a root which to all appearances has long been dead.

The Gilbertine Order died out about four hundred years ago, nevertheless it may be that the founder's spirit is living still :

“ Great deeds never die,
They with the sun and moon renew their light
For ever blessing those who look on them.”

St Gilbert's life, rightly understood, inspires love of the virtues which distinguished it. As the knight-spiritual he set himself to conquer the brutality of the age in which he lived, not by violent invective, but by the daily practice of the maxims which it scorned; so, perchance, in the land he loved so well, there is here and there a boy who, reading St Gilbert's life, will seek a higher holiness in living, a greater courtesy in action, a keener appreciation of learning.

It may be, too, that to our English girls will come a deeper knowledge of the virgin-virtue which the gentle saint gave his life to foster and to preserve.

Should this be so, then in truth St Gilbert's spirit lives, and, through it, still is glory given to the Saviour to serve Whom was the highest ambition of his gracious yet most strenuous life.

CHAPTER XIX

REMAINS OF GILBERTINE PRIORIES

ALTHOUGH the Order of Sempringham grew up under the protection and after the model of Citeaux, yet St Gilbert never sought when building his monasteries to rival or copy the architectural glories of the Cistercian abbeys of Fountains, or Furniss, or Rievaulx. The founder's thought was more fixed upon the object of the buildings than upon the actual structure, although from the earliest days he laid stress upon the fact that the brothers were to build the nuns' chapel "as well as they knew how." A further consideration in his case was the limited and uncertain income at his disposal. Later on, the work in which the canons became engaged other than the care of the nuns, was the motive power which directed the form and extent of the priory buildings.

The ruined abbeys of England, so many of which are fraught with Cistercian memories, tell of high aims and lofty ideals, and are the expres-

sion of minds deeply in love with God. These noble remains which to-day bear witness to the greatness of those who raised them are a wonder of beauty and of grace, an adornment to the earth on which they stand. No greater proof of the power of the tyrant who wrought their destruction could be found than the fact that at his will these marvels of art and industry were, after their desecration, allowed to fall to ruin. The hand of Time, which defaces so much that is beautiful, has added to their loveliness new, if sadder charms. When Henry VIII. determined that the monasteries should be suppressed he had in view, not the acquisition of the treasures they contained, but the gold which they could command; accordingly, when the final order for their destruction was issued, there set out a band of hired labourers whose work it was to wreck and to destroy. The chief commercial wealth of the monasteries lay in the lead on the roofs, and in the bells. The abbays and churches "were vaulted with freestone and covered with lead." Scenes of destruction and desecration went on all over the country.

The account of the suppression of Roche Abbey, in Yorkshire, which stood in the direct road between the houses of Newstead and Malton, may be taken as a fair sample of what occurred

in the Gilbertine houses. The writer had the story from eye-witnesses, and this is what he says: "So soon as the visitors were entered within the gates they called the abbot and other officers of the house, and caused them to deliver up to them all their keys, and took an inventory of all their goods both within doors and without; for all such beasts, horses, sheep, and such cattle as were abroad in pasture or grange places the visitors caused to be brought to their presence; and when they had done so, turned the abbot with all his convent and household forth out of the doors. Which thing was not a little grief to the convent, and all the servants of the house departing one from another, and especially such as with their conscience could not break their profession, for it would have made a heart of flint to have melted and wept to have seen the breaking up of the house, and their sorrowful departing, and the sudden spoil that fell the same day of their departure from the house." He then goes on to tell how every person there, for the people flocked to see the sacking of the convent, might have what he would take, "every good thing cheap," except the unfortunate monks and nuns who were driven forth "with no money to bestow," and who were not allowed to carry away what was their own, although these same

properties were sold for a pittance presently “to any who would buy.”

The narrator then describes the work of destruction : “ Some took the service-books that were in the church, and laid them upon their wain coppes to piece the same. Some took windows of the Hayleith and hid them in their hay ; and likewise they did of many other things : for some pulled forth the iron hooks out of the walls that bought none, when the yeomen and gentlemen of the country had bought the timber of the church. For the church was the first thing that was put to the spoil ; and then the Abbot’s lodging, dorter, and frater, with the cloister and all the buildings thereabout within the abbey walls ; for nothing was spared but the oxhouses and swinecoates, and such other houses of office that stood without the walls ; which had more favour shown them than the very church itself ; which was done by the advice of Cromwell, as Fox reporteth in his Book of Acts and Monuments. It would have pitied any heart to see what tearing up of the lead there was, and plucking up of boards, and throwing down of the sparres : when the lead was torn off and cast down into the church, and the tombs in the church all broken (for in most abbeyes were divers noble men and women, yea, and in some

abbeys kings, whose tombs were regarded no more than the tombs of all other inferior persons : for to what end should they stand, when the the church over them was not spared for their cause), and all things of price either spoiled, carped away, or defaced to the uttermost.

“ The persons that cast the lead into the foddors, plucked up all the seats in the choir, wherein the monks sat when they said service, which were like to the seats in minsters, and burned them and melted the lead therewithal : although there was wood plenty within a flight shot of them : for the abbey stood among the woods and the rocks of stone : in which rocks was pewter vessels that was conveyed away and there hid ; that it seemeth that every person bent himself to filch and spoil what he could : yea, even such persons were content to spoil them, that seemed not two days before to allow their religion and do great worship and reverence at their Matins, Masses, and other service, and all other their doings : which is a strange thing to say, that they could this day think it to be the house of God, and the next day the house of the devil ; or else they would not have been so ready to have spoiled it.”

The writer concludes his letter by stating that his father, who watched the scene and told the

story, and also bought part of the timber of the church, had a good opinion of the religious. He asked him whether he thought well of the religious persons " and of the religion then used. And he told me, Yea : for, said he, I did see no cause to the contrary. Well, said I, then how came it to pass that you were so ready to destroy and spoil the thing that you thought well of? What should I do? said he. Might I not as well as others have some profit of the spoil of the Abbey? For I did see all would away; and therefore I did as others did." In this query, " Might I not as well as others have some profit of the spoil of the Abbey? " and in the excuse, " I did as others did," we learn the secret which explains much of the otherwise inexplicable apathy of the people of England during the time of the great spoliation—the hope of getting something, and the fear of appearing different from other people! Probably modern revolutions have become possibilities through similar weaknesses in good people.

The Gilbertine monasteries fell in quick succession. The remnants which remain to us in stone and mortar do not tell of great richness or artistic beauty. A certain nobility and dignity is discernible, but no lavish display of picturesque wealth such as may be seen in many monastic remains of the time. The ruined abbeys, which

are now reckoned amongst the glories of our land, stand apart from the highways of the world. To this seclusion we owe their preservation. The testimony of John Freeman, "the royal receiver," who was employed by Cromwell to carry out the work of destruction, leaves little doubt on the point. He tells us that he was ordered "to pull down all monastic buildings except what might be of use for farm purposes." In Lincolnshire, where he was employed, there were more great houses than in any other part of England. "The walls were thick, and there were few to buy." He wrote further: "To pull them down will cost the King a great deal," so he recommends the appropriation of the bells, and of the lead on the roof, and then he says, "It were best to pull down the roof and battlements and stairs, and let the walls stand, and charge some with them as a quarry of stone to make sales of as they that have need will fetch." The Gilbertine priories were, for the most part, so situated that it was worth while to "fetch." Fountains, Netley, Furniss, and many another noble shrine were too far removed from inhabited centres to repay the cost of transit. Lincolnshire and Yorkshire were thickly strewn with monasteries, and the spoils were valuable both in quantity and quality. In the neighbourhood of

Lincoln Cathedral there was piled a vast heap of metal melted from the roofs of the monastic churches in the district. "Thousands of tons were floated down the Severn to Bristol to be sold for export."

The work of spoliation was not carried out altogether without protest. Besides the northern risings and the rising in Lincolnshire, which specially protested against the suppression of the monasteries, in some instances, as in the case of Coventry, townsfolk remonstrated against the destruction of buildings which were the glory of their homes; sometimes people of importance besought the King's mercy for this or that monastic building, but all to no purpose.

When the monasteries had been unroofed and dismantled they, with the lands adjoining, were usually handed over to some nobleman or favourite of the King, who paid for the gift either in yearly instalments as rent, or in a lump sum of ready money. The price paid for monastic property did not in any case represent its value. The Duke of Suffolk obtained as many as thirty abbeys and lands; Lord Clinton, to whom Sempringham, Haverholme, and other Gilbertine priories fell, received no less than twelve. John Freeman, to whom allusion has already been made, got possession of Hotoft Grange belonging

to Bullington Priory, and Utterby Grange, belonging to the Gilbertine house at North Ormesby.

The scanty remains of the priories of the Order of Sempringham, which still stand, may be briefly mentioned, as there is little about them to invite description. No complete priory exists. There are, however, three priory churches, all used now as parish churches, which are Gilbertine in origin, and which still contain many interesting remains. The Church of Alvingham differs little from the majority of pre-Reformation village churches. It consists of a nave and two bays, a chancel, and a small modern tower. Inside there is a mutilated effigy of a cross-legged knight, a benefactor, doubtless, of the priory.

The Church of St Mary's at Malton is a more dignified and imposing structure. It is, however, only a portion of the Gilbertine Priory Church. The original nave was one hundred and forty two feet in length, and the whole edifice was of interesting design and workmanship; there were two western towers and a central one between the nave and the choir, and also transepts with square eastern chapels. The high central tower was taken down in 1636, and later a fire destroyed the south aisle. In spite of this and many other vicissitudes to which the Church of St Mary, Old

Malton, has been subjected, it is still a noble remnant of Gilbertine greatness.

Of the Cambridge house no remnant remains. It was given by Henry VIII. to Edward Elvyngton and Henry Metcalfe, and the site of the priory was long known as Chanon's Close. Addenbrooks Hospital marks the position once occupied by St Edmund's Priory.

Watton Priory, at one time the richest of the Sempringham houses, was totally wrecked at the time of the dissolution. John Freeman's idea of using the ruined monastic building as a stone quarry seems to have answered admirably at Watton. The remaining stones were in 1613 taken to repair Beverley Minster. Recent excavations have, however, revealed many interesting relics. So thorough have been the investigations and so complete are the foundations that archæologists have been able to obtain a perfect ground-plan of the priory. The church was two hundred and eight feet long, and fifty-one feet in breadth, not including the transepts. The division wall, usual in the priory churches of double monasteries, was nearly five feet thick. This wall divided the church into two unequal parts, that on the south side being undoubtedly reserved for the canons and the brothers; it was nineteen feet wide, whilst

the north side used by the nuns was twenty-six feet in breadth. Watton Priory had accommodation for one hundred and forty nuns and seventy canons. These excavations, although giving interesting information as to the plan and extent of the priory, do not furnish any clue to the style of architecture employed in the building.

Chicksand Priory, in Bedfordshire, is the most complete remaining relic of St Gilbert's foundations. The church has disappeared and considerable alterations have been made in the main buildings, but the original walls of enormous thickness still stand. The priory is now the seat of Sir Algernon Osborn, and is situated in a green landscape of pastoral beauty, differing little, perhaps, from that so familiar to St Gilbert, when towards the end of the twelfth century he took possession of Chicksand as the gift of Pain de Beauchamp and Roesa his wife.

There is little authentic information available concerning the ruins of other Gilbertine priories. At Mattersey, on the River Idle, in Nottinghamshire, are some broken arches; at Shouldham a few cottages built from priory stones; at Clattercote perishing monastic fragments, rotten oaken rafters and ruins of a church dismantled, disused, and dishonoured.

The pilgrim who in spirit has travelled the

centuries, first in Gilbert's company, then in attendance upon his Order, who has seen the Gilbertine glory rise and set, who has stood by and seen each priory fall at the bidding of a tyrant king, may well, before closing this long pilgrimage, pay a last visit to the cradle of the Order where the founder first saw the light, and where he was laid in his tomb. The only remnant remaining at Sempringham of St Gilbert's day is the parish church of St Andrew. It is not quite the church which Jocelin built, for its early majesty is gone, as also the grandeur of pillar and arch, transepts and tower. Gone, too, is the ancient faith which St Gilbert gave his life to propagate, which he founded his Order to serve. The north wall against which the first cloister was built has been taken down and replaced, but the site is identical; the doorway of the south porch shows that there was once a larger porch with a roof over it, and it is easy to recognise the place where the room was situated in which St Gilbert lived with his chaplain. The present porch is new, but the doorway is the same, and the old door, made of fir-wood and covered with iron scrollwork, is a true relic of the past. Through this door St Gilbert passed many a time in those far-off years—as a boy in the days when St Andrew's Church was newly

built, as a clerk with the responsibilities of a parish priest, and as a founder when he erected that first shelter for the spouses of his King.

The Priory of St Mary was built away from the church, a little to the west. Nothing remains to-day to tell of the beauties of the monastery, or of the grandeurs of the splendid mansion which Lord Clinton built on its site and with its materials. A few grassy mounds mark the place where the cloisters stood. The spot is lonely and desolate. Scattered cottages are the only signs of life. Green pastures stretch away as far as the eye can reach. Perchance St Gilbert's ashes lie hidden here at the pilgrim's feet, for here once stood the Priory Church of St Mary, where his body was laid to rest. What happened to his sacred relics when Cromwell's commissioners caused the leaden roofing to fall with a crash upon the chancel floor?

Perchance as the darkness fell, a band of his sons, fugitive but faithful, stole into the desecrated sanctuary and bore away their holy father's relics to a place of safety, or it may be that they were secretly and reverently buried by the frightened, true-hearted village folk.

Here then, kneeling on the spot where once our saint's body was honoured as becomes the relics of the saints, the pilgrim prays—

“ St Gilbert, lover of children, pray for the children of this country which was once thine own.

“ St Gilbert, gentle knight and brave defender of the brides of Christ, be still the heavenly champion of the spouses of thy Lord.

“ St Gilbert, English in heart and in home, protect England.”

APPENDIX

VISION OF THE POPE AND LITURGICAL REMAINS FROM THE DIGBY MS. IN THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY AT OXFORD

Vision of the Pope (see Chapter xvi)

ON a certain night within ten days after their arrival at the Curia, the Pope lay awake in his bed longer than usual, and began to ponder within himself over the canonisation which was sought of St Gilbert, and he asked God that He would deign to reveal to him, by some sign, what he should do, and that He would lavish His aid on the undertaking. A sleep thereupon interrupted his meditation, and in his sleep the following vision appeared.

He saw before his eyes an immense tower of great height into which he, as he desired to enter, was led by the hands of those who filled it. And he found in it a bed, laid and ornamented most beautifully and, round the bed, a curtain of silk and of great value was hanging, adorned with images of the saints.

He admired the beauty and the splendour of the curtain which because it was of silk he had none like. He tried to draw it to himself and began as if to sew in order that he might fit it to his own couch.

Meanwhile, going aside into another room which seemed near, and turning back, he asked within himself more attentively what he should do regarding the

business of the canons of Sempringham, and concerning the canonisation of him which they sought.

A voice from above reached him, saying to him, "Michael the Archangel will be your assistant in that affair."

The Pope having awakened from so great and so manifest a vision, understood with joy that after long consideration this work was completed, and that it should be settled by him, amongst men, and immediately he composed a prayer concerning him (Gilbert), also a "Secret" (part of the Mass) and a Post-Communion which he afterwards published and ordered to be said in his (Gilbert's) honour. The following are the prayers :—

Collect—"O Eternal Saviour, effect in us the full meed of Thy virtue, that we who venerate the renowned merits of Blessed Gilbert Thy confessor, assisted by his prayers, may be delivered from all diseases in our souls, Who liveth and reigneth with God the Father," etc.

Secret—"May this salutary oblation be acceptable to Thee, O Lord, that as it may redound to the honour of Thy confessor Blessed Gilbert, so it may assist us Thy servants to salvation," etc.

Post-Communion—"We beseech Thee, O Lord, that what has descended from Thee to us may ascend from us to Thee, that by the intercession of Blessed Gilbert Thy confessor, it may purify those whom Jesus Christ, Thy Son and our Lord, has redeemed, Who liveth and reigneth," etc.

Wherefore this most cautious man (the Pope) wishing to be supported with all certitude, sought the interpretation of the vision from a certain very holy and learned

man, the Abbot Reiner, who passing his life in solitude amongst the mountains was held in esteem, both by the Pope and the whole Roman Church because of his renowned sanctity and learning.

The Apostolic lord (the Pope), having summoned him, ordered him to meditate upon the dream, and to explain its significance to him. That man filled with the spirit of Joseph or of Daniel said to him (the Pope), "There is no need for long consideration over this, since the dream and its interpretation are manifest. For the lofty and eminent tower which you saw is the excellence of the Papacy, into which you, being yourself unwilling, were borne by others, since you have not laid hold on it yourself, but others have selected you for it.

"The couch richly bedight is the clear conscience in which one reposes as in a bed. The curtain round the bed bearing images of the saints is the commemoration of the saints which ornaments the conscience while the memory of them is retained in our hearts and in our work. You began to sew in it while you were concerned with this saint of whom there is question, who from that sign is to be commemorated henceforth amongst the saints. What you sought waking, you have demanded in your sleep, and God has assented to your wish, while Michael the Archangel is promised to you as a helper, and not undeservedly so. For Michael is placed high in Heaven, and is appointed by God chief over all souls to be received there. And he has received this holy soul amongst the souls of the saints, and in that high court of blessed spirits over which Michael presides, it has been decreed that this man must henceforth be considered a saint by name and by honour. Insert (embroider) him therefore as he is worthy in that curtain; that is, unite him to the commemoration of the saints."

The solution given by the abbot pleased the Pope, and without delay the general Curia Romana, which was there present, was assembled, the Archbishop of Rheims being present, who bore strong testimony to the sanctity of Gilbert, whom he had known whilst young in England, in the presence of all the clergy and the people sitting round, the nuncios alone standing.

The Pope himself preached an eloquent and affecting sermon on the merits and miracles of St Gilbert, and testimonies and witnesses having been admitted, and many reasons being proposed and alleged (which were necessary for many causes) with the common consent of the whole Church he canonised him, and decreed that his memory should be honoured amongst the saints.

The Missal of the York Use (15th century) gives for February 4, the day on which St Gilbert's feast was originally kept, the Mass of the Common of an Abbot, with the Gospel and Communion from the Mass of a Bishop, and Collect from the Common of a Confessor not a Bishop.

It is probable that the Mass of the Common as above was prescribed for ordinary use, but there was a special Mass containing the prayers given in the vision which, we may presume, was used only in churches belonging to the Gilbertine Order. St Gilbert's Office and the Mass referred to are given in full at the end of his Life in the Digby MS.

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